

BFI

APRIL 2015 VOLUME 25 ISSUE 4

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound

SPECIAL
ISSUE

REMAKE/REMODEL

DIRECTOR'S CUTS & ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

PLUS

- THE S&S INTERVIEW: AGNES VARDA ● TAKAHATA ISAO'S 'THE TALE OF THE PRINCESS KAGUYA'
- VERA CHYTILOVA ● ADAM CURTIS'S 'BITTER LAKE' ● XAVIER DOLAN'S 'MOMMY'

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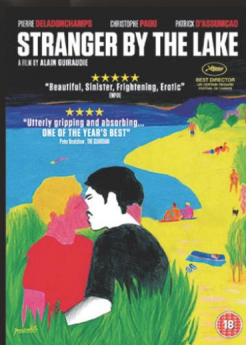
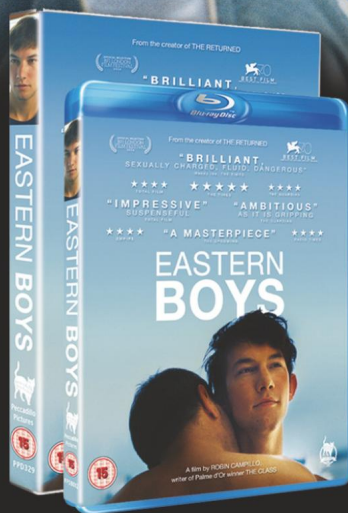


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The S&S Interview: Agnès Varda

Chris Darke talks to the veteran French director, one of the driving spirits of the *nouvelle vague*. PLUS **Gilberto Perez** pays tribute to Varda's rich visual clarity and moral sensitivity

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64^e Internationale
Filmfestspiele
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ALAIN RESNAIS

LIFE OF RILEY

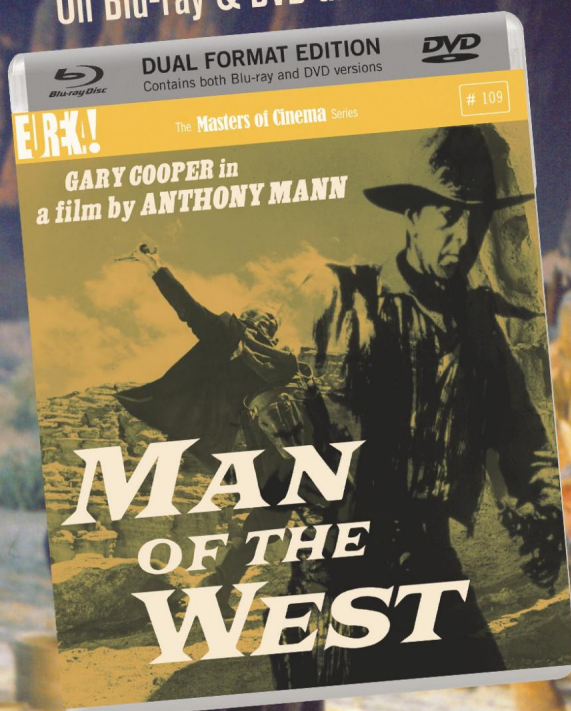
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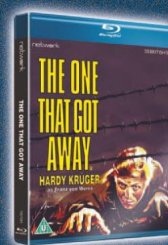
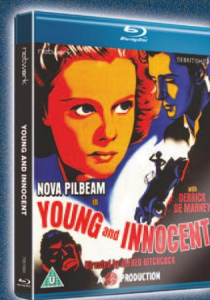
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Editorial Nick James



LOOK BACK IN CANDOUR

Hooray. We're in that moment when the awards season doesn't matter. We don't have to worry any longer about why a special film such as *Boyhood* will always be deemed too 'small' by Academy voters for it to win the Best Picture Oscar. Enjoy it. Take a long hot bath in books or films without stars in them. The lacuna doesn't last long. By June someone somewhere will have tipped something or someone as a surefire contender and the mainstream frenzy will start to build again.

In the meantime we must deal with the big film dump. Quite a quantity of minor titles will appear on the market over the next few weeks – naming no names, of course (the reviews are elsewhere) – in a kind of house clearance, and not many really interesting films will be among them. This is why this is such a perfect moment for our cover story about works of many versions, conceived off the back of the rerelease of *Blade Runner* (see page 18). It's also why we can find the space to celebrate the great Agnès Varda (page 46) as she deserves to be, and indeed why it's a good moment for looking back in general.

During a recent session for one of the *Guardian's* courses on film journalism I opined that, "Cinema is redigesting itself, and audiences have an appetite for reading about cinema history." It was an off-the-cuff remark, but what I had in mind was the astonishing growth of interest in recent years in silent cinema and the fact that historical pieces in *Sight & Sound* are often greeted with more enthusiasm than those about contemporary cinema. Of course, cinema has been redigesting itself since the medium began, but what's different now is this return to the origins, this re-viewing and rethinking of what really matters from early cinema, with a fresh generation of cinephiles beginning to revise the old orthodoxy by pointing to new areas of research that demand attention. Such a chew-backwards likely happens whenever a medium feels under threat, as cinema does now, a time when the specialness of the two-hour feature film is under pressure from live theatre and opera and from box-set television series.

But this redigestion is not just about the silent era. Take, for instance, a small curatorial outfit such as *A Nos Amours*, the partnership of filmmakers Adam Roberts and Joanna Hogg, which has programmed successful screenings of (almost) the complete works of Chantal Akerman over the course of a year, and who recently brought philosopher Jacques Rancière

Hooray. We're in that moment when awards season doesn't matter any longer. Enjoy it. The lacuna doesn't last long. Take a long hot bath in books or films without stars in them



to London to discuss Bresson's *Mouchette*. This kind of niche cinephiliac activity may be open to accusations of elitism but its relative success is notable and was unimaginable even just a few years ago. The same can be said for the Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image's splendid upcoming Essay Film Festival in London (see page 54). Indeed the recent proliferation of film festivals across the UK is quite staggering.

The months before Cannes in May, then, are a kind of anti-Hollywood period of respite from mass-market enthusiasms. I wonder if there isn't a better way to exploit this moment, using it to create something substantial and newsworthy that could act as a bridge between Berlin and Cannes, maybe a way of focusing on film history that's not as specialist as, say, the Bologna festival in late June, but is simply concerned with helping the wider public reconsider cinema history for itself. But I can hear the professionals muttering, "Enough already." Maybe we just need the break.

IN MEMORIAM: GILBERTO PEREZ

We are privileged this month to publish 'Riding the wave' (see page 51), in which Gil Perez meditates on the work of Agnès Varda. It may be the last article the Cuban-American film scholar, who died suddenly in January, ever completed. It seems amazing and dismaying to me now that I only met him once and that we published him so rarely, since all of us here admired his writing so much. Let me recommend his essential book *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* – which confirms that you can write deeply about cinema form and care about elegant prose – and refer you to the memorials to him at the Sarah Lawrence College website and at Jonathan Rosenbaum's website.

IN THE FRAME

DIVINE INTERVENTIONS



Dancer in the dark: Ryan Phillippe in Mark Christopher's newly re-edited *54*, originally released in 1998

This year's BFI Flare delights in great diversity – from Sri Lanka's first gay film to Canadian roller derby to the East London drag scene

By Ben Walters

2014 was a watershed year for the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival: it was rebranded as BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival. 2016 will also be notable, as the festival's 30th edition. And 2017 marks the 50th anniversary of the decriminalisation of gay sex in the UK. So perhaps it's understandable that Flare 2015 feels somewhat reined-in. Not that any less work has gone into this year's edition, which runs from 19-29 March at BFI Southbank, or that it looks short on rewarding titles. But the programme promises solid stimulation rather than a conspicuous thematic angle or specific sense of mission.

Among the dramatic features, the starriest names are to be found in the opening film, *I Am Michael*. Justin Kelly's feature about gay-rights activist turned 'ex-gay' Christian pastor Michael Glatze stars James Franco as Glatze and Zachary Quinto as his partner. There are titles from festival regulars Monika Treut (*Of Girls and Horses*), François Ozon (*The New Girlfriend*) and Carol Morley (*The Falling*, one of several titles already seen in the London Film Festival), and promising features such as the Canadian fortysomething lesbian comic drama *Portrait of a Serial Monogamist*, and *Frangipani*, a love triangle billed as Sri Lanka's first gay film.

Flare continues to put a premium on documentaries, including the closing night film *Out to Win*, about LGBT sportspeople, and gala presentations *Do I Sound Gay?*, about the less-sniggersome-than-it-sounds subject of 'gay voice', and *Stories of Our Lives*, a black-and-white film by Jim Chuchu about LGBT life in Kenya. In fact, Chuchu's film is less a documentary than a collection of stories adapted from an archival research project. Shot on an ordinary DSLR camera, it looks beautiful and has already been banned in its homeland. Some other documentaries focus on notable emblems (*The Last One: Unfolding the AIDS Memorial Quilt*) or figures (*Regarding Susan Sontag*), though the niche offerings are just as intriguing: *In the Turn*,

Made in Britain

To coincide with a showcase of recent innovative British films at London's BFI Southbank, (March 30-April 12), join the editor of 'Sight & Sound', Nick James, at the venue on 2 April at 18.30 as he and a panel of critics and industry insiders examine whether films such as Carol Morley's 'The Falling' (right) and Jonathan Glazer's 'Under the Skin' constitute a new wave in British Cinema.



Albert Serra

The Catalan director, fêted for his minimalist and unconventional adaptations of biblical legends and literary classics, receives his first UK retrospective at Tate Modern, London, from 11-20 March. Among the films showing is Serra's most recent, 'The Story of My Death' (right), which imagines an encounter between Casanova and Dracula, and which will be released on DVD by Second Run.



ON OUR
RADAR



Religious conversion: James Franco and Zachary Quinto in *I Am Michael*

for instance, follows Canada's Vagine Regime, "an international queer collective of roller derby players of all shapes and sizes", so the programme notes explain, as they help out a 10-year-old trans girl whose school won't let her play sport.

This year's archival offerings are largely familiar. There are reprises of recent releases (*Appropriate Behaviour*, *The Duke of Burgundy*, *Pride*) and a literary adaptation strand comprising *The Color Purple* (1985), *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* (1991), *Orlando* (1992) and *Strangers on a Train* (1951) – worthy titles but hardly neglected gems. Nor could *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) be described as a rarity, though an IMAX screening for its 40th birthday sounds rather fab, and provides an excuse to present its sort-of sequel, *Shock Treatment* (1981), a prescient reality-TV satire by the same team of writer Richard O'Brien and director Jim Sharman that features some of the same characters. Another intriguing title from the vaults is *54: The Director's Cut*. The queerest qualities of Mark Christopher's 1998 morality tale, set around the infamous 70s New York City nightclub, were excised by the Weinsteins at Miramax before its original release; this restored version has just been well received at the Berlinale (see 'Remake/remodel', page 24).

A dedicated shorts programme aside, the festival isn't heaving with new work from the UK. An exception is *Dressed as a Girl*, Colin Rothbart's funny, at times disturbing documentary portrait of the East London alternative drag scene. Video work by some of its subjects is included in my own drag-themed event, *BURN: From Hackney to Vauxhall*, which also includes *Save the Tavern*, Tim Brunsden's portrait of London's oldest LGBT pub, the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, recently bought by property developers. The vulnerability of venerable queer spaces is also explored in *We Came to Sweat*, about Brooklyn's now-defunct Starlite, a black gay bar that pre-dated Stonewall.

And fans of the butch will find a fair bit to hold the interest. The documentary *Fulboy* offers a locker-room-and-all portrait of an Argentinian soccer team; *The Golden Age of the American Male* showcases 1950s and 60s physique flicks made by Bob Mizer for the Athletic Model Guild; *Tab Hunter Confidential*, a new doc by *I Am Divine* director Jeffrey Schwarz, lifts the lid on the closeted teen idol. Flare programmer Emma Smart ensures the boys don't hog the fun with a talk called 'We Love Xena: Warrior Princess'. 

 **BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival runs from 19-25 March**

Flatpack Film Festival

The ninth edition of the Birmingham film cornucopia (19-29 March) contains 120 events and as usual tugs at the boundaries of cinema. Highlights include benshi-narrated screenings of Ozu films; a celebration of Roy Andersson, including his latest film 'A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence' (right); a two-day stop-motion animation masterclass from Belgian duo Emma De Swaef and Marc James Roels; and an interactive exhibition 'Amusement Park' (16-28 March) from Finnish collective Animation Crank Handle.



Sherlock Holmes

Resurrected on DVD for the first time in the UK is the BBC's 1964-65 adaptation of Conan Doyle's detective tales, starring Douglas Wilmer as the Baker Street sleuth (right) and Nigel Stock as his loyal sidekick. Among the many special features are two reconstructions of partially surviving episodes and an interview with Wilmer.



LISTOMANIA REEL MURDERS

With the release of *The Face of an Angel*, Michael Winterbottom's reimagining of the Amanda Knox case in Italy (reviewed on page 76), we present a selection of crime films that fictionalise notorious real-life murders.

- 1** **The Hitch-Hiker (1953)**
Ida Lupino
- 2** **In Cold Blood (1967)**
Richard Brooks
- 3** **10 Rillington Place (1971, pictured)**
Richard Fleischer
- 4** **The Black Panther (1977)**
Ian Merrick
- 5** **Vengeance Is Mine (1979)**
Imamura Shohei
- 6** **The Executioner's Song (1982)**
Lawrence Schiller
- 7** **Swoon (1992)**
Tom Kalin
- 8** **Memories of Murder (2003)**
Bong Joon-ho
- 9** **Zodiac (2007)**
David Fincher
- 10** **Snowtown (2011)**
Justin Kurzel



QUOTE OF THE MONTH JOHN SCHLESINGER

'Making a film is like going down a mine – once you've started you bid a metaphorical goodbye to the outside world for the duration'

A restored version of Schlesinger's *Far from the Madding Crowd* is rereleased in UK cinemas on 13 March



BEDTIME STORIES

Cinematic beds, far from being associated with relaxation or love, are often sites of frustration, anxiety and loathing



By Hannah McGill

Had he still been around in 2008, one imagines Stanley Kubrick might have been darkly amused to see the homeware shop Woolworths

pilloried for selling a child's bed with the brand name Lolita. Once the name's connotations were brought to the store's attention, the £395 Lolita Midsleeper Combi was swiftly and blushing withdrawn from sale – though John Lewis still sells a line of Lolita bedclothes, which has evaded controversy presumably because it is aimed at adults. See what you uncover when you Google the words Lolita and 'bed'? Though quite honestly, I was expecting considerably worse... The bed I was actually after on this perilous search is one that crops up in Kubrick's 1961 film of *Lolita*: a folding cot supplied by the hotel to which Humbert Humbert (James Mason) takes his stepdaughter and object of his sexual obsession Lolita (Sue Lyon), when he flees with her in the aftermath of her mother's accidental but highly convenient death. The cot is the centrepiece of a sequence in which Humbert's dark plans for Lolita are alternately enabled and blocked by the fates. There's only one room available, necessitating sharing – but the reason the hotel is near capacity is a convention of policemen. There's no cot, the troopers having "snapped them all up", necessitating bed-sharing – but one is eventually delivered, waking Lolita from the deep sleep on which Humbert has been counting (though he hasn't gone so far as to drug her, as he does in the book).

What ensues is absurd slapstick, with Humbert and the hotel's aged bell-hop tangling with a contraption that keeps unexpectedly folding and unfolding. The analogy with an untameable male libido is apparent. But the scene, in its awkwardness and vicious humour – inviting us to snigger as pratfalls delay the rape of a child! – also epitomises Kubrick's response to the question that served as the film's tagline: "How did they ever make a movie of *Lolita*?" The answer: by translating the unctuous archness and evasive erudition of Vladimir Nabokov's prose into bone-dry, pitch-black, frequently absurdist comedy (with the significant assistance of the author himself, who wrote the script from which Kubrick worked). The humour was in part a deliberate obfuscation of the film's sexual content, intended to fox the censor. But it also works to position Humbert as a put-upon, near-tragic clown – a hellish distortion of Charlie Chaplin, who famously tangled with a folding bed in *One A.M.* (1916) – rather than the deluded but ever-suave controller of the narrative he gets to be in the book. It's possible that the repetition of numbers in Kubrick's later film *The Shining* (1980) – the source of much conjecture in the documentary *Room 237* (2012), which connects it elaborately with conspiracy theories around the Apollo moon landing – is an idea of



Pillow talk: James Mason and Sue Lyon in Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*



Stuck in the middle with you: Charlie Chaplin, fighting an unequal battle with a folding bed in *One A.M.*

Nabokovian origin: Humbert and Lolita seem pursued by the number of their house and hotel room, which is 342 in the book, 242 in the film.

Lolita is an anti-romance – a film in which the sexual union of the main characters is not the summation of the audience's desires, but the stuff of its nightmares. So the various beds on which Lolita lolls are all implicitly as fraught with booby-traps as the recalcitrant hotel cot: she is at continual risk of being “snapped up”, just as Humbert cannot escape the possibility of being destroyed by his desire. Elsewhere in cinema, it tends to be the marital bed that harbours such destructive potential. In *Lost Highway* (1996), Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) nurses his jealousy with particular attentiveness while in bed next to his wife Renee (Patricia Arquette). So fierce is his resentment of her potential to emasculate him that he sees her face on the pillow replaced by that of a wizened, demonic ‘Mystery Man’ (Robert Blake) – one of David Lynch's ludicrous but horrifying

The various beds on which Lolita lolls are implicitly as fraught with booby-traps as the recalcitrant hotel cot



Wake in fright: Rosamund Pike in *Gone Girl*

embodiments of the atavistic terrors that stalk our daily (and nightly) lives. Nothing quite so explicit illustrates the marital conflict in *Gone Girl* (2014), but in bed is where it simmers and comes to the boil. Nick (Ben Affleck) and Amy (Rosamund Pike) start out by gifting one another extravagantly luxurious sheets in smug celebration of their sex life, and wind up fantasising about destroying one another in the bed they share. It is with the promise of another lavish bed that Amy's still-besotted ex Desi (Neil Patrick Harris) tempts her into seclusion with him, little realising that the same bed will also be the site of his own demise.

Cinema has offered more peaceable marital beds – the most extreme example perhaps being John Lennon and Yoko Ono's Hilton Amsterdam ‘bed-in’ protest against the Vietnam war, filmed as *Bed Peace* (1969), which presents the couple's state of pyjama'd, intimate bliss (they were on their honeymoon) as a salutary example to fractious world powers. One can, incidentally, purchase John Lennon-branded bedclothes; Ono licensed his autographs and sketches of animals to nursery outfitters Carter in 1999. Conspiracists may choose to lose sleep over the fact that the suite in which she and Lennon bedded in was numbered 902 in 1969, and is now 702; and that the Amsterdam Hilton is situated on Apollo Avenue. 📍

THE FIVE KEY...

MOTHER AND SON FILMS

In cinema, a boy's relationship with his mother isn't always as straightforward as Sophocles and D.H. Lawrence make out

By Kate Stables

Mother and son fixations, with their nobly self-sacrificing or juicily Oedipal dramas have a small but remarkably potent presence in cinema, where the primal bond assumes a startling significance. From Pudovkin's symbolic and comradely *Mother* (1926), to Pasolini's scrappy streetwalker *Mamma Roma* (1962), via a tranche of Dial-M-for-Mother Hitchcocks (including film's most famous mama's-boy, *Psycho*'s Norman Bates), the emotional current can run high in either direction. Inspired by Xavier Dolan's newly released *Mommy*, a transgressive tale of the intense, combative relationship between a tough mother and her wild teen, we look at five other films that tug on the umbilical cord...



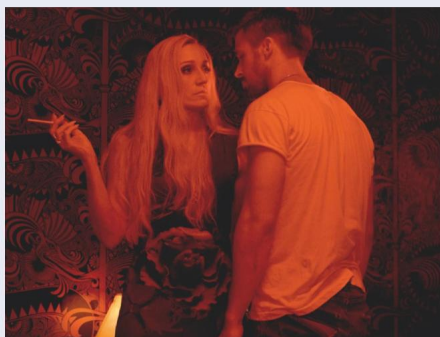
1 Sansho Dayu (1954)

In Mizoguchi's wrenching, transcendent story of suffering in feudal Japan, Tamaki is torn from her children and sold into prostitution. Her desperate cry for them, which carries across time and space with supernatural force, has extraordinary, life-changing power for brutalised son Zushio. The film's redemptive final scene, shot with great delicacy, may be cinema's most powerful paean to unconditional maternal love.



2 The Grifters (1990)

A boy's best friend is most definitely not his mother when the lethal Lilly re-enters small-time con artist Roy's life, in Stephen Frears's unabashedly Oedipal noir. Holding John Cusack's sweating Roy rapt and enraged simultaneously, the drive-to-survive of Anjelica Huston's steely and seductive Lilly makes her that rare beast, the *mère fatale*: “I gave you your life twice. I'm asking you to give me mine once.”



4 Only God Forgives (2013)

Nicolas Winding Refn's gorily stylised Bangkok revenge thriller has a Freudian field day, as Ryan Gosling's mother-transfixed fighter goes several punishing rounds with Kristin Scott Thomas's tongue-lashing, bitch-goddess mother. Complete with castration complexes and patricide, the film's scarlet sets and fearlessly lurid plotting give a whole new slant to the phrase ‘back to the womb’.



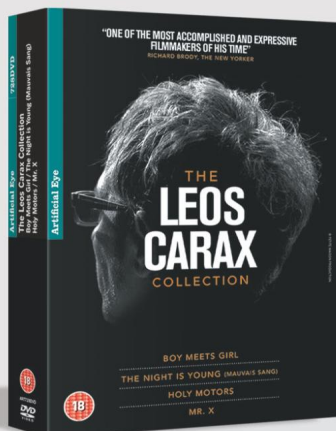
3 Mother (2009)

Kim Hye-ja, veteran portrayal of idealised Korean mothers, turns the tables in Bong Joon-ho's sly smother-love thriller, aided by the deliciously dopey Won Bin as her parasitic son. Mother's mission to clear her murder-suspect son's name is formed from unnervingly light and dark notes, and as maternal devotion threatens to trump morality, attachment parenting may never look truly wholesome again.



5 Me, Myself and Mum (2013)

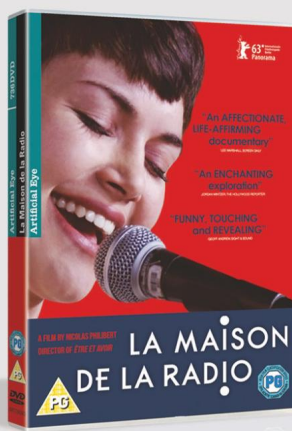
Man and mother, art and life merge seamlessly in Guillaume Gallienne's exuberant but flagrantly sincere autobiographical comedy, in which he plays both his girlish younger self, and his adored if judgemental mother – convinced, perhaps prematurely, of his homosexuality. Urging him to explore his sexual options, she bestrides his shame-filled adolescence like a chain-smoking Colossus.



The Leos Carax Collection

You can now own three mesmerising works from one of the most prominent voices in contemporary French cinema. Also includes *Mr. X*, the documentary that delves deep into the work and life of Carax himself as friends, critics and fellow filmmakers discuss his films and their importance.

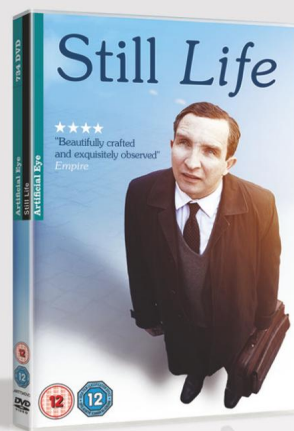
Out on DVD & Blu-ray 23 February



La Maison de la Radio

Acclaimed documentarian Nicolas Philibert takes a charming and insightful look into a French national institution that is usually only heard, Radio France. Witness the discussion, debate, wit, creation and philanthropy that occurs on and off the air at a place which is not just a radio broadcasting house but a cultural gem.

Out on DVD 23 March



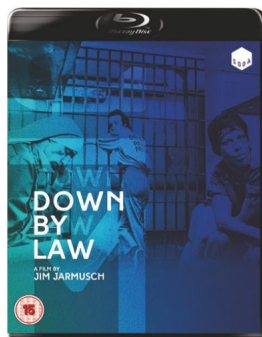
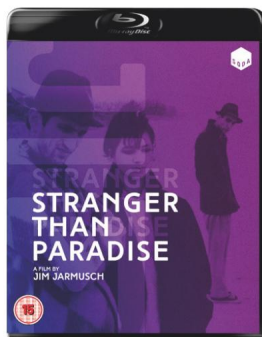
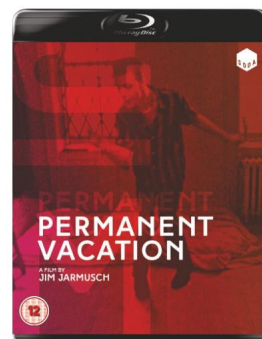
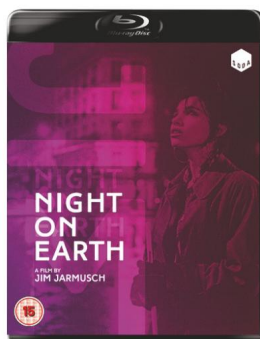
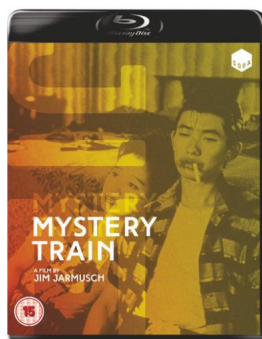
Still Life

Eddie Marsan plays a council worker whose job it is to organise the funeral of those who died alone and find distant relatives who may wish to attend. A touching tale charmingly rendered, which demonstrates how diligence and kindness to your fellow man can inadvertently lead to the end of your own problems as well.

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PULLING BACK THE VEIL



There were some great discoveries at this year's Sundance, but surely the festival can cast its net wider and showcase a truly global cinema?



By Mark Cousins

We live in the real world, then go to the movies to escape it. Our faces age, but James Dean's doesn't. That's the big idea in cinema, isn't it?

The holy rood of Hollywood and Bollywood?

At times, film festivals turn this big idea on its head. They're somewhat unreal places whose cinemas entice us into the dark to see, on screen, the sorts of realism, lives and truths which year-round cinema often avoids.

Take Sundance, where I've just been for the first time in 20 years. Ringed by *trompe l'oeil* mountains and up-lit by snow, it feels like VR (virtual reality), as if you're wearing a headset. The altitude makes you light-headed. Weirdly, in the snow, there are heat shimmers. As with most film festivals, days are VR elongated: you get up at seven, but are still meeting people or seeing movies at midnight. Conversations overlap. People, films and observations are *glissando*. You prowl, like a tracking shot prowls, and then you realise that a film festival is like a Robert Altman film – all people and slippage between life and movies. With its snow and mountains, Sundance is *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*.

In Sundance, in particular, it's the movies that stop the slippage. In their attempt to counter Hollywood's dreamscape, its lies about love and heroism, ageing and politics, Sundance's film selectors tend to skew in the opposite direction. I was on the World Cinema Documentary Jury this year and saw the pain of being alive,

and human fortitude beyond regular film and media paradigms. In Frida and Lasse Barkfors's extraordinary *Pervert Park*, about a group of sex offenders living together in a trailer park in Florida, a young mum speaks on camera, for the first time, about forcing her son to have sex with her. She had been abused for years by her dad, and her son went on to abuse. In a group meeting, the residents discuss how they are called monsters by the outside world. The mum says that she's the only monster in the group. Not only is she wrong to label herself in this way, but in the film, having committed the worst of crimes, then admitted it – in public – and expressed great remorse and no self pity, she demonstrates real courage. I'll remember her for a long time.

In Hao Zhou's *The Chinese Mayor*, Geng Tanbo, the city of Datong's political boss, is compelling too. Like Haussmann in 19th-century Paris, he's trying to redraw his city. He's forcing tens of thousands of residents out of their *hutong* houses in order to rebuild Datong's imperial city walls, to restore civic pride, attract tourism and enact a new business model for Datong – culture rather than manufacture. Most portrayals of China depict identikit party apparatchiks pushing people around like pawns. In *The Chinese Mayor* people are indeed treated this way, but its world is less Manichean. Geng causes suffering, but his reasoning is credible: he listens to complaints; his daily life is full of street disputation; he's impatient but anguished; perhaps wrong, but well-intentioned. In the West we have expectations of how Chinese politicians should be. The Shakespearean Geng challenges these.

Festivals entice us into the dark to see, on screen, the sorts of realism, lives and truths which year-round cinema often avoids

Other films dug deep, too. Mor Loushy's *Censored Voices* took us back to the Six-Day War in 1967 and, using sound interviews conducted just days after that great victory for Israel/tragedy for Egypt, it shows that some of the Israeli soldiers themselves were uncomfortable with the triumphalism, the whitewashing of history. And Chad Gracia's *The Russian Woodpecker* was a Wellesian portrait of young artist Fedor Alexandrovich's detective-like crusade to try to show that the explosion at Chernobyl was a deliberate act by Russia to cover up the failure of a vast, malfunctioning eavesdropping system that was situated nearby. I say Wellesian because Alexandrovich is like Hank Quinlan in *Touch of Evil*: wrong but maybe right, oblivious to rules. The film bulges around him, baroque, beautiful and unpredictable. And somehow, amid all this character stuff, obsession, and speculation about what happened in the 80s, *The Russian Woodpecker* manages to be about Ukraine, today.

So the films pulled back the veil. If anything, not enough. In our World Cinema Documentary section, we saw a lot in the English language. From Africa, there was just one film, Samba Gadjigo and Jason Silverman's valuable portrait of the great Senegalese director Ousmane Sembène. Iran is making some of the best docs in the world at the moment, but we saw none of them. And what about India? Japan? Korea? South America? Other festivals, on other continents, cover these areas, of course, but as Sundance is such a tastemaker, and rightly celebrates the global reach of a filmmaker such as Kim Longinotto, then surely it can cast its net even further. Anand Patwardhan should be in its pantheon. As should Seyed Reza Razavi, who made the brilliant *Seconds of Lead*. And Yasukuni director Li Ying. And Turkey's Ozgür Dogan and Belmin Söylemez. And Iosif Pasternak. And Monster Jimenez from the Philippines.

Maybe they are. Sundance was great. In Altman films, you lose your bearings. 📺

DEVELOPMENT TALE

SUITE FRANÇAISE



Bitter Suite: Matthias Schoenaerts and Michelle Williams as Bruno and Lucile

How do you turn two novellas into one film? And how do you make a French story in English without turning it into 'Allo 'Allo?'

By Charles Gant

In the 1990s, five decades after she and her sister had been entrusted with what she believed were her mother Irène Némirovsky's diaries, Denise Epstein discovered the handwritten notebooks contained an unfinished novel. Written by Némirovsky after the outbreak of World War II, when she had quit Paris for the French countryside, the two novellas – *Storm in June* and *Dolce* – chronicle French life under German occupation. Sadly, the envisioned third, fourth and fifth parts of *Suite française* were never written: in 1942 Némirovsky was transported to Auschwitz, where she swiftly died of typhus.

Published in 2004, *Suite française* was an immediate bestseller, and in 2006 *Variety* announced that Universal had secured an option on the film rights, with Kathleen Kennedy (*Schindler's List*) and her husband Frank Marshall (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*) producing and Ronald Harwood (*The Pianist*) to write the screenplay.

What happened next remains something of a mystery, but a year later the film division of French broadcaster TF1 announced that it

had acquired rights to the book. TF1's Romain Brémond comments: "Denise Epstein was very concerned about the film adaptation. French law protects the writer and the estate. When the book was released, I enquired after film rights, but they were dealing with an American company. I met Denise at a book fair in Paris in 2007. I told her I was a fan of the book, and how sad it was that it wouldn't be a French production. A few weeks later, I got a call from the publisher asking if we would still be interested in the rights."

Brémond's first instinct was to make the film in French, with French stars. "I proposed the film to a very famous French director who is quite well known outside of France. So it would have been a possibility to finance the film internationally. The filmmaker was on the verge of another shoot; we met; he was very excited about the project. When the shoot was completed, we got in touch again. He was very concerned about the adaptation – he couldn't see the way to write it because of the two parts.

"The question came whether to produce the film in English. We didn't have so many French directors who represented commercial names outside of France. We had a discussion with Denise, and she said that she was trusting in us, in me as well."

TF1 had distributed the 2008 film *The Duchess* in France, and Brémond was a fan of its director Saul Dibb. "It was a classical film; at

the same time it was really modern the way it was dealing with the feeling of the characters. It was the perfect mix of what I was looking for in the adaptation." The pair met in Cannes in 2009, and Dibb enthusiastically signed on.

The first novella, *Storm in June*, concerns the German occupation of Paris and the exodus of those who were able, and could afford, to leave for the countryside. The second, *Dolce*, depicts occupied life in the small town of Bussy, focusing on the burgeoning love between a French woman, Lucile, and the German officer billeted on her.

"The two finished parts don't directly relate to each other," Dibb says. "I pitched them the idea of doing the second part. It felt clear to me that the only way I would be able to do it was to take Lucile as the central character."

By this time Michael Kuhn, the British producer of *The Duchess*, was also on board, while Epstein, via TF1, remained creatively involved. She was concerned about the idea of omitting the exodus, and Dibb came up with an ingenious solution: "I thought, I can get a lot of that starting in the countryside and having the Parisian refugees descend on them. I would create a first act out of *Storm in June*."

Usually it's the producer who pushes to bring on a second writer, but in the case of *Suite française* the impulse came from Dibb himself. "If you've not got it exactly where you want it

with two drafts, it's time to bring somebody else in and bring some fresh eyes to it. I'd cracked the structure of it, but I wanted to bring out more of the character, more of the inner dynamic."

Kuhn and Dibb met with several writers, and settled on Matt Charman, a British playwright who at the time had virtually no screen credits to his name, but who has subsequently co-written upcoming Cold War thriller *St James Place*, directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Tom Hanks. Dibb comments, "Although Matt is a superstar writer now, back then he wasn't on any of the financiers' lists of hot and agreed writers. He simply came up with the best ideas."

Charman focused on a bag of denunciation letters, written by the villagers, and carried by the German officer Bruno von Falk. As Dibb recalls, "Matt said: 'That's a great dramatic device. You've got a bag full of secrets. That needs to be the officer's job. Within it needs to be a denunciation that directly relates to Lucile, so he's the keeper of a secret that she doesn't know about.'"

When it came to filming, a decision had to be made about accents. Dibb says, "I think English people with French accents would be an *'Allo 'Allo'* situation, which I was very keen to avoid." By retaining English accents, he was also able to easily delineate the class of all the characters – class being a resonant theme of the source material. He adds, "I was also keen that we weren't in a world where everyone suddenly spoke

If you've not got it exactly where you want it with two drafts, it's time to bring somebody else in and bring some fresh eyes to it

the same language. The Germans needed to be German actors, speaking German, with subtitles."

In fact, Bruno is played by the Belgian actor Matthias Schoenaerts, who worked with a dialect coach, although it may be pertinent that the actor's first language is Flemish rather than French. Michelle Williams was cast as Lucile, with Kristin Scott Thomas as her mother-in-law, and Sam Riley, Ruth Wilson, Margot Robbie and Alexandra Maria Lara in supporting roles. But Eileen Atkins, whose name still appears on the film's IMDb page, has been omitted from the final film.

Dibb and Charman had added a framing device, depicting Denise Epstein (Atkins) discovering her mother's manuscript. Says Dibb, "The success of the book is because of the magnifying effect of the story in the book and the story of the book. And together they create something bigger, and more resonant and more affecting. Having met Denise, it felt an obvious thing to try and make work."

Unfortunately, this proved confusing for test audiences, as Brémond explains: "It was very emotional, but it was confusing. People thought Michelle's character was Irene Némirovsky, which is not the case at all. People couldn't understand whether *Suite française* was a biography or fiction. It was really difficult for the audience." ❗

i *Suite française* is released in UK cinemas on 13 March and is reviewed on page 89

THE NUMBERS FIFTY SHADES OF GREY

By Charles Gant

When *Fifty Shades of Grey* opened on Valentine's weekend on multiple screens in multiplexes nationwide, nobody was surprised by the saturation strategy. But the film's strong showing in the independent sector provoked a few raised eyebrows, especially when it was noticed that the erotic drama was playing at all five screens at the Curzon Victoria.

Picturehouse chief booker Clare Binns, who had the film on at 15 of her 20 venues, comments: "It's a film that everybody wanted to see, regardless of how it turned out. As it turned out, the film was quite good fun, and the woman's character was pretty strong. I was relieved. Not to play it would have been stupid. We're here to serve our audience, not our personal views on films."

Binns played *Fifty Shades* at just one screen in each of her cinemas, with the exception of Clapham, which added evening shows at a second screen. "This is what's slightly depressing about it," she says. "If you are multiplex with 12 screens, I understand you would have it in several screens. But when you're a company that is trying to keep an independent spirit, there's room for everything else."

With the majority of the awards titles on the wane by mid-February, *Fifty Shades* proved a timely opportunity – a bonus treat in the annual release calendar, since it's rare to see a blockbuster arrive at this time of year. The film opened with £13.55 million, the biggest ever for an 18-certificate title and for a February release. It's also the ninth-biggest three-day opening of all time.

To some extent, the film's invasion of the country's more commercially minded independent cinemas became a self-fulfilling prophecy: distributors suspected this would be the case, and stayed away from the release date. Altitude offered Ira Sachs's *Love Is Strange*, which played in all the art-houses and a few upscale multiplexes,



Spanking the competition: *Fifty Shades of Grey*

but otherwise the February 13 frame offered slim pickings to the indie venues. Holdover titles such as *Selma* predominated.

In contrast to Picturehouse, Everyman (12 cinemas playing *Fifty Shades*) and Curzon (eight cinemas), the UK's regional film theatres stayed away from the film. Mark Cosgrove at the Bristol Watershed, a venue notoriously indifferent to the temptations of blockbuster opportunities, says: "What we're about is extending audience choice. This film didn't need Watershed's help getting out to an audience. If you're getting public investment, then you have a responsibility to provide the public with additional value."

The Watershed derives around 15 per cent of its turnover from subsidy, which comes from the local authority, Arts Council, BFI and the EU's Europa Cinemas scheme. Adds Cosgrove, "I describe it as: we are in the business of culture, not the culture of business. It's got to work as a business model, otherwise we wouldn't exist. But we must never allow that to cloud our cultural remit. We're developing audiences for a broader range of cinema." ❗

UK BOX OFFICE FOR EROTIC GENRE TITLES

Film	Year	Gross
Fifty Shades of Grey	2015	£25,242,636*
Basic Instinct	1992	£15,480,560
Unfaithful	2002	£3,726,798
Sliver	1993	£2,975,985
Body of Evidence	1993	£1,568,388
The Lover	1992	£1,375,697
Wild Orchid	1990	£1,235,846
Wild Things	1998	£1,019,368
Showgirls	1996	£936,483
Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love	1997	£289,372

*Gross after ten days

CIRCUIT TRAINING

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

Making an impact at festivals can be the key to arthouse success – but knowing how to do that is an art in itself



By Ben Roberts

I'd been quietly wondering (worrying) if the purple patch for British films would continue. Last year was a vintage one,

commercially and critically. Our annual statistics, released last month, showed record levels of film production in the UK (over £1.47 billion) and a high 16 per cent market share for British independent films. It was the year that Yann Demange arrived, *Under the Skin* finally opened, *Belle* was a big draw in the US, Mike Leigh hit a critical and box-office high, and Paul King managed not only to keep *Paddington* uniquely his, but went on to have the biggest UK film of the year. (Irritating, then, that Bafta voters ignored every one of them and continue to treat British film like the children's table at a wedding, but that's a conversation for another time...)

So I'm pleased to report that we're already scoring at the first festivals of 2015. First, Sundance, where John Maclean's risky, BFI-backed feature debut *Slow West* won the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize, having already been bought by A24 for the US. Two BFI-backed documentaries, *Dark Horse* and *How to Change the World*, sold to Sony Pictures Classics and Netflix respectively, and John Crowley's *Brooklyn* – again, BFI-backed – sold to Fox Searchlight for a headline-grabby \$9 million, one of the largest deals in Sundance history. Then Berlin, where Andrew Haigh's competition entry, *45 Years*, won Silver Bears for both its leads and secured a US distribution deal with IFC Films (financier and distributor of *Boyhood*) after a polite acquisitions skirmish in the second week of the festival.

An invitation from one of the major international festivals is the holy grail for pretty much everything we support, as it is for the rest of the independent film market. Simple odds mean that most fail to secure their first choice and, having been a sales agent myself, I can tell you that without a significant platform to screen to major press and buyers, some films will never make their mark.

While a film's fate is largely in the hands of the festival teams, you need to have a strategy for the festivals and even the sections that you want to target. This means knowing where the buyers go, which festivals the press attend in numbers, and which get covered by the national press back home. It means knowing the difference between Directors' Fortnight and Critics' Week,

An invitation from one of the major international festivals is the holy grail for pretty much everything the BFI supports



Good news Bears: 45 Years

the taste of the Midnight crowds at Sundance and Toronto, the profile of Venice Days versus Orizzonti – intelligence that not every producer has at their fingertips. For example, *Brooklyn* was a slam-dunk for the Sundance crowd – a genial audience who will respond enthusiastically to a crowd-pleaser among the more challenging titles. It played in the Premieres section (not in the competition), which often delivers commercial hits, and buyers will often prioritise it as a result.

It also means knowing which festival invite will nix another. For example, most European festivals won't consider UK films for their competition or other key sections if that film has had its world premiere in the US. So *Brooklyn* couldn't play in competition in Berlin after premiering in Sundance. Only last week, a producer we are supporting was all systems go for a premiere at Tribeca, until he realised that that would take Cannes off the table.

45 Years had the luxury of invitations from Sundance and Berlin, but Andrew already had a good profile in the US from the premiere of his previous film, *Weekend* (2011), at SXSW and his TV work on HBO's *Looking*, so all involved agreed that the red-carpet pedigree of Berlin and the chance of Silver or Golden Bears – we were all prepared to take the punt for acting in particular – would push the film in another direction.

After Berlin, most eyes turn to Cannes. One of our jobs at the Film Fund is to put on a show for the festival selection teams, many of whom come to the BFI at Stephen Street in March to screen potential titles, courtesy of the British Council. There are always far more films (and lots of debuts this year) than the festival can ever accommodate. Sometimes a bit of a dance takes place between several sections wanting the same film (*The Selfish Giant* was a recent example) and all we can do is try to help steer things to the right home. In Clio Barnard's case, it was a matter of taking the bird in the hand: Directors' Fortnight became the start of a relationship with Cannes without the punishing expectations that can accompany a Competition slot.

Sometimes the best strategy is to keep expectations low, and the response might go in the opposite direction. We sold *Monsters* and *Kill List* at fanboy mecca SXSW when no one else was really looking. When the films took off it caused buyer panic and a rush to view that we'd never have achieved in a bigger and busier market. A good working knowledge of the festival circuit can really pay dividends. @bifiben

IN PRODUCTION

● **Neill Blomkamp** has landed every science-fiction fan's dream job and been given the green light by Twentieth Century Fox to develop a new film in the *Alien* franchise. The involvement of the South African director of *Elysium*, *District 9* and the upcoming *Chappie* had been rumoured for some time. No word yet as to Sigourney Weaver's involvement.

● **Cristi Puiu** has been shooting his next feature, *Sierra-Nevada*, in Bucharest. The film follows a family reunion after the death of a family patriarch. The Romanian director of *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* and *Aurora* has said that the film is "a story about a commemoration that never gets to take place, a story about those who choose to escape into fiction and hide their fears behind 'concrete reality' when overwhelmed by a grief they cannot understand."

● **Nicolas Winding Refn** has cast Keanu Reeves and Christina Hendricks (who was also in his *Drive*) in *The Neon Demon*, the Danish director's follow-up to the divisive *Only God Forgives*. The film is described as a "subversive female-driven horror". Shooting begins at the end of March.

● **Asif Kapadia** has begun shooting his next feature *Ali and Nino* in Baku, Azerbaijan. The film is based on a bestselling 1937 novel by the mysterious Kurban Said – the identity behind the pseudonym has never been definitively established. It is the story of the love between a Muslim boy and a Christian girl, set in Baku against the backdrop of World War I and Azerbaijan's brief period of independence following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

● **Tran Anh Hung** begins shooting his sixth feature *Eternité* later this month. The Vietnamese director of *The Scent of Green Papaya*, *Cyclo*, *I Come with the Rain* and *Norwegian Wood* has lined up a starry cast that includes Audrey Tautou, Bérénice Bejo and Mélanie Laurent. The film is based on the novel *L'Élégance des veuves* by Alice Ferney, a story that spans the 20th century, charting the lives and loves of several members of a family.

● **Michelle Williams and Kelly Reichardt** (below) are fast becoming one of the key actor-director partnerships. The pair are to work together for the third time, on an as-yet-untitled drama. Williams, who starred in Reichardt's *Wendy and Lucy* and *Meek's Cutoff*, is also scheduled to star in *Manchester-by-the-Sea*, by Margaret director Kenneth Lonergan, with shooting due to start after completion of the Reichardt film.



fresh produce



the grandmaster
also available on blu-ray
released 30/03/15

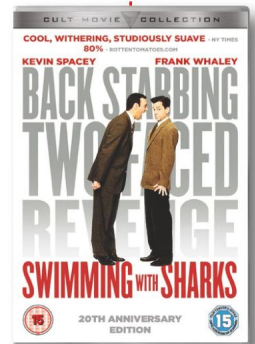


pelo malo
released 30/03/15

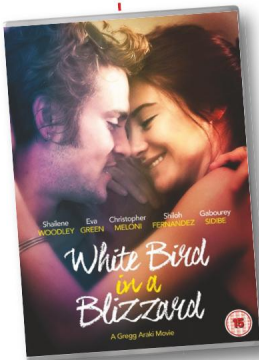


electricity
released 06/04/15

swimming with sharks
20th anniversary edition
released 16/03/15



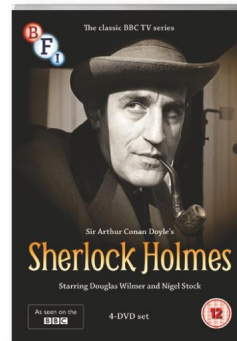
white bird in a blizzard
released 30/03/15



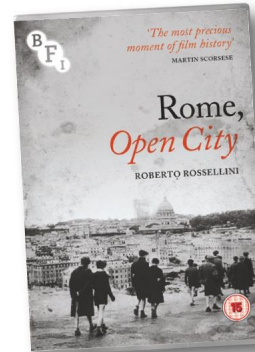
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kyoto inferno** - steelbook
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released 06/04/15



mea culpa
released 23/03/15

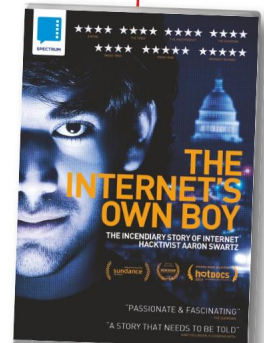


sherlock holmes
released 30/03/15

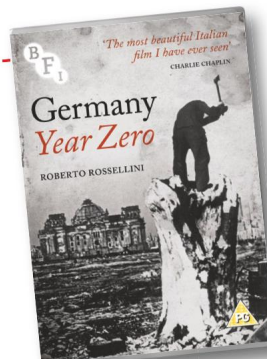


rome, open city
released 30/03/15

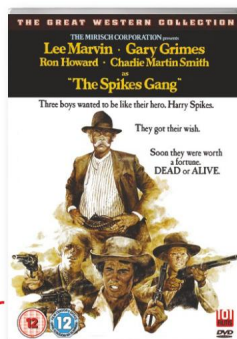
the internet's own boy
released 16/03/15



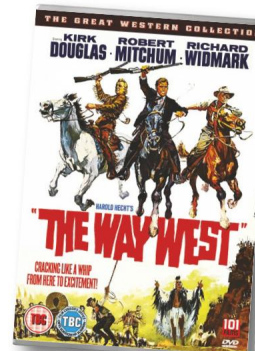
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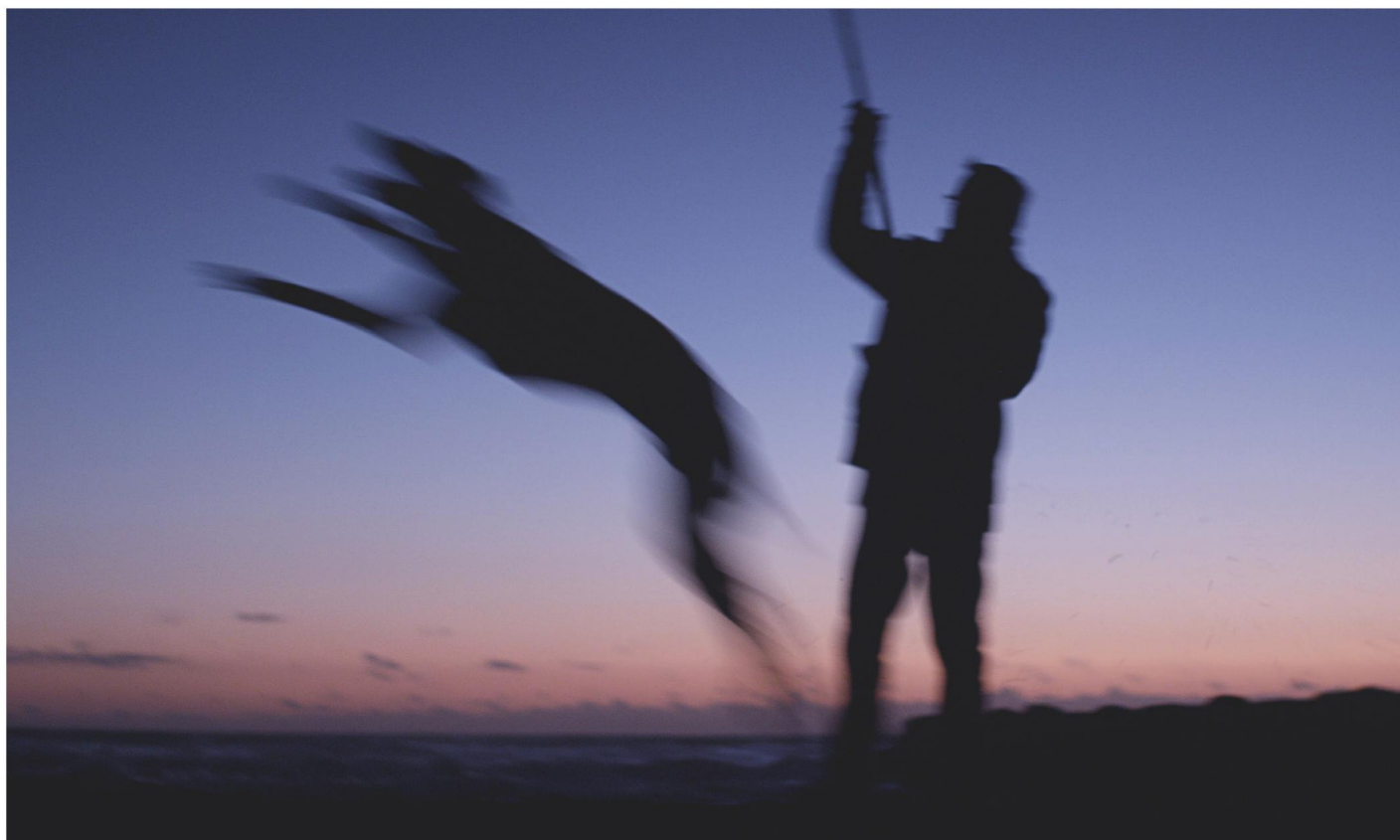
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BERLIN

REACH FOR THE SKY



Seeing the light: Pablo Larraín's *The Club*, a tale of priests seeking to escape the sins of their past, seeks to expose the iniquities of organised religion

Films by Pablo Larraín, Jafar Panahi and Peter Greenaway all managed to live up to expectation in a very satisfying edition of the festival

By Nick James

Not for some time has Berlin pleased so consistently as it did this year. Given the presence of so many bigish names, several of whom owe loyalty to the Berlinale for sticking with them, you might say it was a fulfilment of auteurist promise. It was at Berlin that Jafar Panahi's *Closed Curtain*, his fractured follow-up to *This Is Not a Film* (which played Cannes), won the best script prize in 2013. This year, Panahi's *Taxi* was not only a worthy winner of the Golden Bear, but – being a wry comedy of manners set in the confines of a car – also an unusually small-scale big prize winner.

Panahi himself plays a taxi driver in the film, looking gauche in glasses and a flat cap, and his pick-ups tend to recognise him as a local celebrity (a double bluff, since we twig they're all his actors). Seemingly off-the-cuff, amusing and sometimes spiky conversations bubble up as he drives around Tehran. In the first, a petty crook in the front seat opines that kids who steal car tyres should be hanged, thereby irritating a middle-class woman in the back, who upbraids him for his lack of heart. Next comes a drily comic seller

of pirated DVDs who has to share the lift with two old ladies who want to return a pair of goldfish in a glass bowl to a shrine – an accident waiting to happen. When later Panahi picks up his sharp young niece, who also totes a movie camera and harbours her own ideas about cinema, what seemed at first like a gentle tribute to Kiarostami's *10* (2002) becomes a delicious, affectionate multi-levelled parody. By the end, helped by Panahi's own oddball charm and willingness to send himself up, this intricate revision of the what-can-a-director-under-government-restriction-make deftly turns its dilemma into a brilliant solution.

The everyday concerns of *Taxi* were, however, a long way from the metaphysical themes that appeared dominant at the festival. More representative of this trend was the expansive beach scene, shot in the magic hour, that opened one film, with the music of Arvo Pärt playing and a windsurfer skimming the water in the distance as a man plays with his sleek greyhound. How typical, you might think, of late Terrence Malick! But this was Pablo Larraín's *The Club*, which won the Grand Jury Prize, and his intention was not to open our eyes to the sublime but rather to toy with such notions and expose the iniquities of organised religion.

The title *The Club* refers to four priests and a nun, Monica (Antonia Zegers), all of whom live discreetly in an isolated house in a beach town under an ordered, cosy regime part-funded by

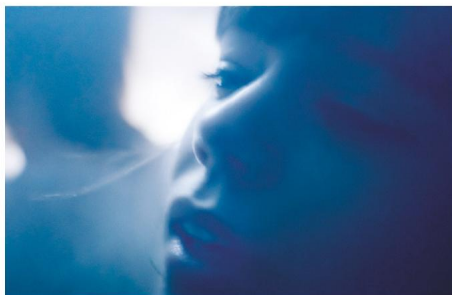
racing their very fast greyhound. After a new arrival, Father Lazcano (José Soza), is delivered to their door, a stranger, Sandokan (Roberto Farías), arrives and begins to barrack the house with obscene descriptions of what Lazcano did to him sexually, as a boy. A tragic death follows, and so Father García (Marcelo Alonso), a handsome quasi-psychologist, is sent to clean up the consequences; but instead the mire gets deeper and stickier, matching the grainy look of Sergio Armstrong's cinematography.

Larraín's spiky, intricately woven black comedy was exactly the antidote I needed after viewing Malick's *Knight of Cups*. The film takes the set-up of a mythic quest in which a young prince of "the east" goes west, "into Egypt to find a pearl", but loses his memory. The prince in question is Rick, a screenwriter of comedies, who is played by a mostly silent Christian Bale, and Egypt here is Santa Monica, Venice, Downtown Los Angeles and Las Vegas, with occasional relieving ventures into Death Valley, Joshua Tree and other landscapes of isolated beauty. Rick inhabits a world of outlandish West Coast parties populated by women photographed as if they were gorgeous sea creatures, and he and his chosen consorts (Imogen Poots and Natalie Portman among them) move through a series of high-life experiences that are signalled by chapter headings mostly taken from tarot cards ('The Knight of Cups' is one such card).

Since I hope to write in depth in a future issue about Malick's late style, I'll restrict my comments here to my own tale of seduction and disenchantment: the first time I saw *Knight of Cups* (in London on a smallish screen) the onrush of Emmanuel Lubezki's wide-angle lensed Steadicam images and its exploration of space was more than enough to gainsay the irritating banalities of the whispered voiceover dialogue. At the Berlin viewing, on a really big screen, however, these musings felt repetitive, gormless and preachy. In his recent films Malick seems to echo some of Rick's lostness himself. His late aesthetic, despite its striving for hushed transcendence, keeps striking big, brassy, hollow notes.

While Larraín showed us humans trying to hide past sins and Malick had us staring at the sky hoping to unburden us of the love we can't express, in *The Pearl Button* Patricio Guzmán, Larraín's fellow countryman, showed us a heartbreaking history of the indigenous seagoing population of the islands of Southern Patagonia, who decorated their bodies with white marks that equate stars with droplets of water, and who believed that when they died they took their place in the heavens. This visual analogy between water and the stars is one of several observations that inspire this elegant essay, which ties together the horrors of colonialism with those of the Pinochet era and makes great play of elemental matters in a similar fashion to the director's *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010).

Equally extraordinary in its way was Radu Jude's *Aferim!* – the title is an ironic Romanian borrowing of an Ottoman Turkish expression meaning 'Bravo!' In early 19th-century Wallachia, all gypsies are enslaved. Costandin (Teodor Corban), a clumsy old buffer of a constable, has been given a mission by a local boyar to track down a gypsy runaway who's accused of raping the boyar's wife. Costandin's scrawny son, a trainee in the policing trade, is along for the ride, but it's his flintlock and sabre that will be required first should anything go awry. So natural-seeming, well-observed and meticulously researched are the incidents these two encounter – involving priests, rival police, intimidated peasantry, terrified gypsies and so on – that the film combines the best pleasures of historical romp, road movie and western. Everything is authentic in feel and look but never attention-grabbing. The film simply says, 'This is how it was: crude, brutal and idiotic.' Combined with that ease of period, however, is a rich plundering of the language and prejudices of its time, which is likely to make you gasp and laugh despite yourself.



Sebastian Schipper's *Victoria*



Motor mouth: Jafar Panahi's Golden Bear-winning *Taxi*

Andrew Haigh's present-day drama *45 Years* wields a deadly form of gentility. As retired couple Geoff (Tom Courtenay) and Kate (Charlotte Rampling) Mercer near their 45th wedding anniversary, Geoff gets a shocking letter from Switzerland which opens up an old love wound to match the heart bypass scar dividing his chest. I won't reveal what the news is, but the outcome sees him musing on his past in a way that makes Kate more sensitive about her own place in his affections. One or two off moments in the first 20 minutes notwithstanding, the film is a display of fine acting and quiet observation on a restrained cinematic scale that's as unshowy, subtle and effective as Haigh's surprise hit *Weekend* (2011).

Strongest at the more suspenseful end of things was Sebastian Schipper's technically accomplished *Victoria*, a nice-girl-meets-dodgy-gang overnight drama that happens convincingly in real time and was shot in one take. Victoria (Laia Costa) is a young middle-class Spanish woman getting smashed in a nightclub who hooks up with an up-for-it bunch of drunken Berlin boys led by Sonne (Frederick Lau). As she gets to know them better she realises she is becoming entangled in an increasingly dangerous situation. It's the kind of story where

Peter Greenaway has regained some of his showman's sparkle from the days of 'The Cook, The Thief, His Wife & Her Lover'



Peter Greenaway's *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*

you have to discount mounting implausibilities and go with the energy and emotion, and if you do the tension becomes almost unendurable. This was the most impressive German film I saw, far outclassing Andreas Dresen's pitifully clichéd celebratory tale of Leipzig juvenile delinquency *As We Were Dreaming*.

French cinema had little of impact on show here. Neither the sulky flatness of Benoît Jacquot's too-ordinary version of the much-filmed tale *Diary of a Chambermaid* nor the curio that is Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche's *Story of Judas* impressed me much. The latter's apocryphal revision of the 12th apostle's fate starts out promising a Pasolini-like faithfulness to New Testament time and place, and its idea of Judas as Christ's right-hand man intrigues at first, but the film's portrayals of biblical figures become too theatrical to carry anything but academic interest.

One might have expected to say the same, given his recent form, about Peter Greenaway's *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, but the veteran director has regained some of his showman's sparkle from the days of *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*. It's also arguable that *Eisenstein* is the least Greenaway-like film he has made, being the kind of psychosexual portrait of artistic crisis in which Ken Russell once specialised. Of course, formally, it's rather different. The great Soviet film director and explorer of montage Sergei Eisenstein arrives in Mexico partly to escape the lethal atmosphere for artists in Moscow at the time, and over the next few months gets himself deflowered by a man and finds his imagination liberated while his team do most of the filming for what would become *iQue Viva México!* Greenaway presents both the sex act and the angst within a huge rectangular hotel room with a glass floor. Here the white-suited Eisenstein romps, and as he explicates his complex dilemmas, photographs pop up around him of the people he's referring to. Infuriating as Greenaway's films often are in their desire to pummel points home, *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* is mostly thrilling in its sense of pedagogical adventure. It was the last of the 23 films I saw at a Berlin for which 'established auteur regains form' might have been a fitting tagline. ☺

REMAKE/ REMODEL

DIRECTOR'S CUTS & ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

All films exist in slightly different cuts – because they have been dubbed, say, or censored for television – but sometimes the alternative versions are fascinating in their own right, with entirely new scenes and different rhythms that enable them to stand on their own against the original. Here we pick 50 of the most intriguing examples. Introduction by James Bell

To muse on how a film might have turned out had certain decisions been different is the cinephile's equivalent of the historian's 'What if?' parlour game. We might, for example, imagine an alternate reality in which Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* had been released unbutchered, or Stanley Kubrick had decided to go with Alex North's music for 2001: *A Space Odyssey* rather than the classical pieces he used originally as mere guides.

Such speculations are an indulgent game, to be sure, but they do prompt consideration of just what we're referring to when we discuss a film that *does* exist in different versions: whether in a director's cut or a studio-imposed truncation; a shortened edit or a 'Redux' expansion. Which version is definitive, and what does that mean? Are the original intentions of the director always the best guide, or once a film is released to the public does it acquire a value outside its creator's control, much like a song does? That's no doubt true in part, but like the difference between a song rereleased with a few overdubs, and the release of an altogether separate take, there's a qualitative distinction to be made between, say, tinkering with special effects to keep pace with new technology (though try telling George Lucas), and the existence of versions with new scenes and different editing rhythms. In one sense almost all films exist in a number of versions: films are routinely edited for screening on aeroplanes; edits may be required by different national censorship boards; and there's the routine practice of dubbing in certain countries, as just some examples. And yet such instances usually amount to little of real significance – the narcissism of small differences.

The 50 examples that follow are all cases where the reworkings are fascinating in their own right. They show how the alternative version and the director's cut have historically come about for many different reasons – censorship, the screening needs of television, the director who can't resist the temptation to get back to the editing suite... They also show how the practice stretches back to the days of silent cinema, how the coming of sound led to different language versions being produced simultaneously, and how the practice persisted

DVD and Blu-ray has added fuel to the idea that a film can forever remain a work in progress – and an irresistible money-spinner

through the heyday of the studio era and beyond.

But there's no doubt that the rise first of home video and then of DVD and Blu-ray has added fuel to the idea that a film can forever remain a work in progress, and that the release of alternative versions can be an irresistible money-spinner. A quick search for 'extended cuts' online reveals numerous welcome examples, such as the longer cut of Kenneth Lonergan's much-troubled *Margaret* (2011), or the expanded *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), which many feel better captured the immersive grimness of Tolkien's novel than Peter Jackson's theatrical cut. But alongside these examples is a daunting list of films it's doubtful anyone knew they wanted more of – an extended cut of *Coyote Ugly* (2000), anyone? Several 'Harder' versions of the Liam Neeson *Taken* films? There's even, for the truly masochistic, a longer version of the *Sex and the City* movie. The issuing of extended cuts on DVD and Blu-ray has almost become the norm for a certain tier of Hollywood output, and threatens to smother the genuinely interesting cases that still emerge.

If one director has become more famous than any other for his reworkings – while at the same time walking an uneasy line between the interesting and indulgent as he does so – it's Ridley Scott. His obsession with returning to his films began with his 1982 science-fiction masterwork *Blade Runner* – a quintessential example of a film in which the various cuts each fascinate, giving different character motivations, and fundamentally changing the overall tone and impact.

The 50 entries that follow make no claim to be a comprehensive survey of alternative versions – that would be impossible – but they throw the spotlight on to some of the most intriguing examples, all of which are worth seeking out. 

Blade Runner: The Final Cut is rereleased by the BFI on 3 April

APOCALYPSE NOW/ APOCALYPSE NOW REDUX

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA, US, 1979/2001

Coppola was early in the re-edit game, tinkering with *The Godfather* I and II to produce the chronological *The Godfather: A Novel for Television* in 1977. And what was *The Conversation* (1974) if not an obsessive excavation of the cutting-room floor; the dizzying possibilities unlocked in alternate takes? In *Apocalypse Now* Coppola reached for something grandiose but elusive – the war movie to end all war movies, the definitive statement on Vietnam. "My film is not about Vietnam," he said. "It is Vietnam." No wonder this hallucinatory phantasmagoria always had the feel of an unfinished masterwork. It shared the Palme d'Or in May 1979 as a "work in progress", and that summer 70mm, 35mm and European releases came with different endings. Even then, there was tantalising talk of a 289-minute work print, sequences ("the French plantation scene") that would underline the historical context, and – the elephant in the room – more Brando, more Kurtz, more *more*. Eleanor Coppola's memoir *Notes on the Making of Apocalypse Now* and (much later) the documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (1991) gave us glimpses, fragments, hints of the Great White Whale in Francis's head. *Apocalypse Now Redux* duly delivers an additional 49 minutes, but arguably diminishes the movie's mystique. **Tom Charity**

ASHES OF TIME/ASHES OF TIME REDUX

WONG KAR WAI, HONG KONG, 1994/2008

What you've heard is all true. Wong Kar Wai takes months or even years to shoot his films because he chooses not to finalise a script; Wong takes his post-production to the wire every time and is often still shooting/editing/sound-mixing a week before his premiere in Cannes; Wong obsessively tinkers with the edit of his films after their premieres, sometimes for months. The three different released versions of *The Grandmaster* are the tip of the iceberg.

Wong established himself as Mr Indecisive with his second feature *Days of Being Wild* (1990), a film that became a diptych in 



his mind as the shoot dragged on, only to be released as a (somewhat enigmatic) standalone movie when the producer pulled the plug. He went from that into his all-star martial-arts fantasia *Ashes of Time*, a great film eventually completed and released in 1994 – but unseen in many countries because of a legal dispute. Fourteen years later, now in full control of his copyright, Wong returned to the editing suite to “make it the film it was always intended to be”. This meant adding chapter titles, a grandiose new score (with a Yo-Yo Ma cello solo!), and a little CGI embellishment. The changes allowed him to release it as a ‘new’ film, but most fans preferred the original. **Tony Rayns**

BETTY BLUE

JEAN-JACQUES BEINEIX, FRANCE, 1986

That Jean-Jacques Beineix's 1986 screen adaptation of Philippe Djian's steamy novel *37° 2 le matin* is regarded more as a softcore *cause célèbre* than a serious work is partly down to iconically sexy, predominantly unclothed performances by Jean-Hugues Anglade and Béatrice Dalle. But Beineix's *version intégrale*, released in 2005, complicates the story beyond the central fantasy of a human sex toy who's disposed of when she blows a psychological fuse. An extra hour of plot and character development permits

luxurious absorption in the camaraderie as well as the carnality of Betty and Zorg's relationship; and if his solution to their problems remains somewhat extreme, this cut renders much fuller and more sympathetic the journey he takes to get there. All of which also makes it sexier, assuming that you like your movie sex to occur between characters who seem to have inner lives as well as beautiful bodies. **Hannah McGill**

BLACKMAIL

ALFRED HITCHCOCK, UK, 1929

In 1929, charged with making a ‘goat-gland’ version of his next title – that is, a silent movie pumped up with a few sound scenes to add some talkie virility – Alfred Hitchcock rebelled. Unbeknown to his studio superiors, Hitch shot *Blackmail* as both a silent and Britain's first sound film, and despite the time limitations this imposed, and the novelty of the format, both are excellent. While in the silent, a creeping shadow across a breakfast table represents the heroine's queasy conscience, Hitchcock adeptly uses sound design in the talkie to hit the same mark. Such ingenuity compensates for the clunky dubbing of Czech star Anny Ondra. This was performed live, with Joan Barry projecting her clipped English elocution from just out of shot while Ondra mouthed her lines. This double-shooting

was unusual, if not quite a one-off – Maurice Elvey also shot his futuristic 1929 thriller *High Treason* in two versions. **Pamela Hutchinson**

DAS BOOT

WOLFGANG PETERSEN, GERMANY, 1981

After a two-year shoot, utilising detailed life-size mock-ups of both the interior and exterior of a German WWII sub, Wolfgang Petersen's nerve-shredding chronicle of life and death on a U-96 hit US and German cinemas screens in 1981 as a 149-minute feature that merely represented the action highlights of the material. Four years later the full picture emerged when UK and then German TV broadcast a 300-minute miniseries version – initially as three 100-minute films, later in six 50-minute episodes. With weekly credits and recaps removed, that incarnation forms 2004's two-DVD set *Das Boot: The Original Uncut Version*, best capturing the slow build-up of tension in commander Jürgen Prochnow's fateful mission, though the significant gains are in character and atmosphere since the key combat sequences appear in all the different releases. However, Petersen's 1997 209-minute theatrical ‘director's cut’, saw him revisiting the material and tightening the pace for the big screen while retaining much of the characterisation. That result may still be preferred by some non-



completists for providing a riveting, single-session viewing experience. **Trevor Johnston**

BRAZIL

TERRY GILLIAM, UK, 1985

Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* may be the most 'versioned' film of modern times, with at least four significantly different cuts, all of which were triumphantly included in Criterion's five-disc LaserDisc edition, and largely carried over into an early three-disc DVD edition. The trouble began when Gilliam placed a full-page ad in *Variety* challenging Universal boss Sid Sheinberg to "release my film". By this time there was a 142-minute European version and a simplified 131-minute American one. Then Universal added insult to injury by commissioning a 93-minute version for TV and theatrical release, although Gilliam had his revenge in a "final final" director's cut for Criterion that mixed elements of the earlier versions and included some revealing scenes dropped from both. What was always a fluid fantasy, with an original script by Tom Stoppard, has since become a multitext labyrinth that echoes its own central theme of Jonathan Pryce's everyman trapped in an incomprehensible *Nineteen Eighty-Four*-like bureaucracy. **Ian Christie**

A BRIGHTER SUMMER DAY

EDWARD YANG, TAIWAN, 1991

At the heart of Edward Yang's *magnum opus* is a question: in the Taiwan of the late 1950s, what is the link between a father arrested and interrogated as a suspected communist sympathiser and a son who stabs and kills the girl he loves? Yang based the film on his own childhood memories (school days, gang fights, Elvis records) but saw it as a dissection of a society and a culture approaching breaking point – and the not-so-elusive link between the father and the son provides the key to his analysis. The original four-hour film explores the issues in painstaking detail. The more widely seen three-hour abridgement, made at the request of distributors and sales agents, streamlines the plot and leaves gaps in the argument. **Tony Rayns**

CATCHFIRE/BACKTRACK

ALAN SMITHEE, US, 1989

By the time *Catchfire* appeared in cinemas it was already widely known that its credited auteur, Alan Smithee, was not a real person, but rather the standard pseudonym used by directors wishing to disown films that had suffered studio interference. The actual director of the film, originally titled *Backtrack*, was Dennis Hopper, and despite rumours that he had turned in an unreleasable three-hour cut, his preferred version ran to 116 minutes, just 17 minutes longer than the studio edition. In either variant, this is a quirky but relatively straightforward commercial thriller, and if the re-edit by distributor Vestron Pictures eliminates some bizarre touches (notably Alex Cox's cameo as D.H. Lawrence), most of the changes feel as arbitrary as the retitling; *Catchfire* even restores scenes Hopper had left on the cutting-room floor. Hopper's cut was issued on VHS in the US, but the only available DVD is Artisan's Region 1 disc, which contains the Alan Smithee/*Catchfire*



JOHN CASSAVETES

Much is made of the improvisational feel of Cassavetes's work, even though he wrote detailed, lengthy screenplays. Still, it's true that he allowed his actors (and himself) the freedom to change things around on the floor, and because he captured multiple master shots – sometimes as many as 50 – he amassed enormous amounts of footage. It was in the editing room that he could really improvise ('he' in this case should be understood to encompass an extended collective of friends, family, cast and crew), and with no studio to insist on release dates or deadlines, Team Cassavetes could riff and revise almost indefinitely. From the top,

Shadows (1959) exists in two radically different versions, although the filmmaker disowned the original cut and it is virtually impossible to see it. Large chunks were excised from the rough cuts of *Faces* (1968), *Husbands* (1970) and *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974), some of which are now available online or in DVD supplements; nevertheless, we have 'definitive', authored versions of these movies (beware the sanitised 131-minute cut of *Husbands*, however). *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (1976, pictured above) is a different story. The 108-minute 1978 version isn't just a tighter cut-down of the 135-minute 1976 original release, it's a parallel film utilising many alternate takes, hitting new stresses and beats. Both are vital. **Tom Charity**

version... only with the title changed back to *Backtrack*, and the direction attributed, on both packaging and credits, to Hopper. **Brad Stevens**

CINEMA PARADISO

GIUSEPPE TORNATORE, ITALY, 1988

Giuseppe Tornatore won an Oscar, a Bafta and the hearts of arthouse audiences for what's essentially the mere husk of his original inspiration. His story of a film director recalling the Sicilian boyhood that sparked his passion for cinema first played Bari's 1988 Europa Cinema Festival in Tornatore's 173-minute cut, only to tank when shorn of 18 minutes for its subsequent Italian release. Commercial pressures saw the now-familiar 124-minute cut launching in Cannes the following May, achieved by brutally excising the darker emotions in Tornatore's rich fresco. Out went a troubling portrayal of Philippe Noiret's curmudgeonly projectionist, plus key present-day discoveries made by homecoming auteur Jacques Perrin. Hence, the famous final kissing montage, which in the cut-down version offers a pleasurable rush of sentimental nostalgia, proves far more complex in its integral form, powerfully suggesting the emotions Perrin's

broken, betrayed protagonist has spent much of his life unable to feel. **Trevor Johnston**

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND

STEVEN SPIELBERG, US, 1977

Close Encounters of the Third Kind initiated the trend for reissuing successful films with previously unseen footage, thus encouraging people who had already seen them once to do so again. Released theatrically in 1980, the 'Special Edition' restores some character-based moments that had been left on the cutting-room floor, but actually runs three minutes shorter than the original, thanks to the removal of several scenes, notably those involving the near-psychotic behaviour of Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss). Spielberg primarily undertook this new version because it enabled him to shoot a sequence in which a ship is discovered in the middle of the Gobi Desert. It was Columbia that insisted on Spielberg also showing Neary entering the mothership at the end. In 1997, Spielberg assembled a third edit that eliminated the shots of Neary in the mothership, and restored much of the footage trimmed from the special edition. All three versions are now available on DVD. **Brad Stevens**



THE COLOUR OF POMEGRANATES SERGEI PARAJANOV, SOVIET UNION, 1968

Sergei Parajanov's masterpiece was initially screened in 1969 in a 77-minute version with Armenian intertitles, and subsequently in 1973 in a 73-minute version with Russian intertitles restructured by fellow filmmaker Sergei Yutkevich. This naturally triggered the assumption that the Armenian cut was the 'director's cut', but it transpired that it had also been completed and heavily censored by others, one major alteration being the removal of all verbal references to the Armenian poet Sayat Nova, the film's subject and original title. Another complication is that the surviving prints of the Armenian cut were of much poorer visual quality than the Soviet cut, making the latter a more aesthetically satisfying viewing experience. Given the absence of a definitive version, when Martin Scorsese's Film Foundation recently undertook a long overdue restoration of the film, they wisely opted to restore both cuts, although the Armenian version has been favoured for festival screenings. **Michael Brooke**

DAWN OF THE DEAD GEORGE A. ROMERO, ITALY/US, 1978

George Romero's long-awaited follow-up to *Night of the Living Dead* proved just as profoundly influential, achieving its seismic impact despite being available in several radically different versions. To secure financial backing from Dario Argento, Romero had to grant him the right to prepare his own edit for non-English-speaking territories. Fans have been torn ever since between the Argento version, the Romero one, a so-called 'director's cut' that, confusingly, the director doesn't actually care for, and various other permutations. Scored by his prog rock pals from Goblin, Argento's version is darker (literally as well as figuratively), skimping on character development and going for full-on, straight-faced zombie action. Chiefly scored with library tracks, Romero's is longer, looser, more playful, yet no less apocalyptic. But if you're after the zombie who has his head bisected by helicopter blades – or the hilariously rinky-dink end theme, 'The Gonk', which is so central to the film's satirical intent – it's the Romero you need. **Jonathan Rigby**

DEEP RED DARIO ARGENTO, ITALY, 1975

Dario Argento's films are today afforded luxurious special-edition Blu-ray presentations, but this was not always the case; like many of his compatriot genre filmmakers of the time, Argento's films were, for the most part, originally released outside Italy in truncated and retitled versions by unscrupulous distributors hungry to exploit the audience appetites of the moment. One classic Argento film that fell foul of this fate is the definitive *giallo*, *Deep Red*, which runs 126 minutes in its integral Italian cut, supervised by Argento himself. Its original US theatrical release, by Howard Mahler Films, removed around 22 minutes of material, including some of the gory violence, most of the light-hearted romantic interplay between stars David Hemmings and Daria Nicolodi, and the film's haunting 'House of the Screaming Child' sub-plot. In the early 1980s, *Deep Red* would be further mistreated on pan-and-scan VHS editions, which horribly cropped the film's Techniscope image and, in one case, retitled the film *The Hatchet Murders*. Thankfully more recent DVD and Blu-ray editions have restored the film to its original length, although the English audio has sadly been lost (or was never recorded) for some of the scenes that were cut for export. **James Blackford**

DONNIE DARKO RICHARD KELLY, US, 2001

Twenty minutes longer and with a different soundtrack, Richard Kelly's 2004 alternative cut of his slow-burning indie hit arguably serves as a warning to directors tempted to let a film's cult status go to their heads – and as significant evidence that the director doesn't always know best. Kelly's cut, which he called "my ideal version of the film", tackles much more explicitly the original's most overtly geek-baiting elements – its impressionistic, imprecise engagement with religion, numerology and time-travel theory. Though the different music tracks and some deleted scenes are fun for fans, the shifted emphasis catastrophically messes with what made the original film most memorable – its foregrounding of its protagonist's emotional state, and its refusal to be upfront about how much of his supernatural experience is simply symptomatic. In adding layers of self-conscious mystique, it attempts to force the audience's response to it in a particular direction – a wood-for-the-trees affliction common to the least successful director's cuts. **Hannah McGill**

DRACULA GEORGE MELFORD, US, 1931

Huge hit though it was, Tod Browning's *Dracula* looks like a film made by someone who lost interest at an early stage. The opening reel (armadillos and all) has tremendous atmosphere, the rest not so much. Ordered to make a Spanish-language version on the night shift, George Melford embraced all the visual inventiveness missed by Browning – the Count rising in eerie palls of smoke, Renfield screaming in the haloed orb of a ship's porthole, hellish stripes of light piercing through fog, and crane shots that make far better use of Charles D. Hall's



POWELL & PRESSBURGER

As recently as the 1970s, Powell and Pressburger's films were almost impossible to find, particularly if you wanted to see them in their original form. Once rising critical esteem began to challenge the years of neglect, probably the major discovery was the full-length *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), first restored to its original 163-minute flashback form by the BFI in 1985. Before this, the BBC had been instrumental in restoring cuts and eliminating a post-war flashback inserted into *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) and also in rescuing Powell's breakthrough *The Edge of the World* (1937) with a 'Return to' prelude.

The visual quality of the 40s Technicolor films has been dramatically improved by recent Scorsese-funded restorations, but the most recent of these, *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951, pictured above), now has the lyrical third act – which its producer Alexander Korda originally wanted removed – firmly in place, along with some delightful extra footage not seen since the film's premiere.

Rumours persist that there may have been sequences censored from Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) but, if so, these seem not to have survived. However, modern versions of Powell's *Age of Consent* (1969) have had minor cuts reinserted and Peter Sculthorpe's fine original score restored. **Ian Christie**

monumental sets. Though reportedly sharing Bela Lugosi's hairpiece, Carlos Villarias can't quite match Lugosi's uncanny magnetism, but he's certainly more feral. And Melford tidies up a few narrative threads left dangling by the indifferent Browning. The film runs more than 25 minutes longer than its progenitor, and Lugosi's estimate of it – "beautiful, great, splendid" – has since been echoed by many. **Jonathan Rigby**

DUNE

DAVID LYNCH, US, 1984

David Lynch never hid the fact that he had no control over the theatrical cut of his spice-added adaptation of Frank Herbert's intricate space epic. But it wasn't until 1988's three-hour TV version – complete with unicorn-in-the-moonlight fantasy art intro, recycled shots and just about every half-finished scene the hamfisted editors could fish out of the cutting bin – that he chose to remove his name from the credits, making *Dune* one of the most high-profile entries in Alan Smithee's storied CV. Interestingly, the film has now resurfaced in a totally unauthorised fan edit – the 'Alternative Edition Redux', courtesy of the enigmatic Spicediver – which improves considerably on both existing versions, retaining the cosmic extravagance of Lynch's vision while rearranging the story into something closer to Herbert's novel, and even digitally restoring the blue-in-blue shades of the Fremen's eyes that the Smithee cut had overlooked. It's testament to the devotion of Lynch fans that he's so well served by the increasingly productive fan-cut community: the extended cut of *Blue Velvet* (1996) is also worth a look, as is a recent edit of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), which surfaced just weeks after the release on Blu-ray of 90 minutes of the much-heralded 'Missing Pieces'. **Tom Huddleston**

EVE

JOSEPH LOSEY, UK, 1962

Joseph Losey released three films in 1963, culminating in *The Servant*, though not by choice. Hammer had shelved *The Damned* for two years before dumping it sans press show, and Losey himself tried to quash the British release of *Eve* (aka *Eva*), reported by Richard Roud to have "suffered more mutilations, amputations, and distortions than any film in recent memory". Losey's longest cut was 168 minutes; the shortest he could tolerate was 135. Successive versions, for the French premiere, then the French release, were shorter, and the London cut came in at 111 minutes. In 1966 there emerged a slightly longer Scandinavian print, with subtitles burned in, of which Losey pronounced himself "content to be judged on its merits", and this has since been misleadingly marketed as the 'director's cut' on DVD. However, Losey's objections were not restricted to the running time. As he told Tom Milne, "More damage in a sense was done to the picture by the interference with the soundtrack than with the image itself." Just three out of 23 planned Billie Holiday tracks survived post-production, and Vima Lisi's performance, which Losey had painstakingly dubbed with the voice of another Italian actress, Anna Proclemer, was in turn dubbed into American English. **Henry K. Miller**



Channel hopping: René Clair's musical *Le Million* (1931)

TONGUE TWISTERS

The introduction of talkies in the late 1920s posed a new set of problems for films hoping to play on the international stage. **By Henry K. Miller**

Silent films, in Michael Powell's recollection, "had international currency", playing "on equal terms" whatever their country of origin: "It was only a matter of a new set of titles for each country." In reality, they were cut and retitled without compunction, sometimes indeed to disguise their country of origin. Seminal films, central to the development of filmmakers of Powell's generation, may in fact have been seen in radically inauthentic versions.

The critics provided a measure of vigilance. When the novelist Arnold Bennett was paid a princely £500 to write English titles for F.W. Murnau's *Faust* (1926), C.A. Lejeune complained in the *Manchester Guardian* that "the fine medieval calligraphy of the original German copy" had been lost.

The introduction of sound posed far greater problems. Some European films, including British productions such as Hitchcock's *Murder!* (1930), were shot in multiple versions with different casts, and such German productions as von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930) were shot in both German and English-language versions. Others employed more ingenious means. While the French dialogue was retained in René Clair's musical *Le Million* (1931), two peripheral Englishmen were added

Two Englishmen were added to the initial British release of 'Le Million', commenting on events through a skylight

to the initial British release, watching and commenting on events through a skylight.

Dubbing never really caught on in the UK. The playwright Charles Bennett travelled to Berlin to provide Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) with English dialogue, and wrote with pride about his efforts, but the critics were united in their disdain. "A range of expression perfectly controlled and aptly exploited passes over faces from whose mouths issues speech often false in emphasis and almost always undramatic in cadence," as the *Spectator* put it. Peter Lorre's performance alone shone through: two years later Bennett would help write his first English role for Hitchcock.

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to circumvent the language barrier was Sacha Guitry's *The Pearls of the Crown* (1937), which included French, Italian and English dialogue, yet was intended by Guitry to need no subtitles or dubbing in any country. According to Graham Greene, however, while "the essential clues to understanding" were provided in each language, subtitles were imposed by the distributor nonetheless.

International co-productions flourished after the war, when European studios began to attract American talent, leading to the kind of scenario sent up by Jean-Luc Godard in *Le Mépris* (1963), in which a significant role is played by Giorgia Moll, herself fluent in four languages, as a translator. Naturally the film was then dubbed into English, and Moll's performance was ruined. It didn't open in England till 1970 – in the subtitled version. **S**



54

MARK CHRISTOPHER, US, 1998

In 1998, Mark Christopher – a New Queer Cinema flagwaver for his short films – was given a \$13 million budget by Miramax to make his long-cherished film about the New York disco mecca Studio 54. The movie, *54*, suffered death by a thousand cuts, when Long Island test audiences gave a thumbs-down to the hedonism and bisexuality, especially a kissing scene between permanently shirtless bartenders Shane (Ryan Phillippe) and Greg (Breckin Meyer). Their love triangle with Salma Hayek's Anita was at the core of the story, but you wouldn't have known that from the poorly received theatrical cut, which removed 40 minutes of material and added 30 more of clumsy reshoots, at Harvey and Bob Weinstein's insistence.

After extensive lobbying, Christopher was finally given permission to reconstruct his original cut from dailies. This re-edit, which just received its world premiere in Berlin, is a wholly merited salvage job that gives the film its mojo back. The 30 minutes of studio-imposed reshoots have been almost entirely removed, and 36 minutes of cut material restored. Mike Myers's languidly hilarious turn as venue boss Steve Rubell was the one aspect praised on release, but his co-stars ace their work, too, now that continuity and context have been restored. Phillippe, meanly nominated for a Worst Actor Razzie at the time, should have turned heads as much as Mark Wahlberg did in *Boogie Nights*: a film whose glitter-encrusted East Coast twin has been hereby resuscitated. **Tim Robey**

A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS

SERGIO LEONE, ITALY, 1964

In 1977, director Monte Hellman – who had started out doing bits and pieces for Roger Corman – was hired to make a prologue for Sergio Leone's seminal spaghetti western for

a US TV screening. The apparent brief was to take the edge off the original's amorality by transforming the lead from a drifting mercenary into an agent of the official law. A double in Clint Eastwood's poncho and cigar is hauled from a jail cell and given a pardon by a warden (Harry Dean Stanton) on the condition that he go on an undercover mission to the lawless border town of San Miguel and bring down the two criminal gangs who are running the place. A few close-ups of Eastwood's eyes are edited in, but otherwise the new material doesn't obtrude on Leone's film, except to root it more firmly in a style of 1950s western morality that Leone had deliberately set aside. **Kim Newman**

GOJIRA/GODZILLA, KING OF THE MONSTERS!

ISHIRO HONDA/TERRY O. MORSE, JAPAN/US, 1954/1956

Ishiro Honda's *Gojira* was made in imitation of the American *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) but played to very specific Japanese concerns – the lingering memory and effects of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and an international incident involving the crew of a fishing boat irradiated by a US Pacific bomb test are obvious subtexts for the story of an irradiated monster that attacks Japan. In preparing the film

The 1995 restored colour version of *Jour de fête*

for American release, under the title *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!*, director Terry Morse re-edited Honda's film, reordering the story and cutting back on any criticism of US foreign policy, and shot new scenes with Raymond Burr as an American reporter in Tokyo who covers the story from the ruins. Burr also provides narration that minimises the need to dub sections of the original film into English. With a pleasing circularity, Toho revived the franchise in 1984 with a new *Gojira* and its foreign distributors rehired Burr to play the same character in added scenes that served the same purpose as the material Morse shot in 1956. **Kim Newman**

THE GOLD RUSH

CHARLES CHAPLIN, US, 1925/1942

In the sound era, several changes were forced upon silent films. Some may have been improvements, while others were indignities – they were edited, given voiceovers and new music, played at a faster speed... All of these things, in 1942, Chaplin did to his own 1925 beauty *The Gold Rush* and as a result, unexpectedly, this silent classic went on to bag Oscars for best sound recording and best music. The score, written by Chaplin, is a pretty addition; his own narration, while eloquent, is largely redundant. The pathos of the boot-eating sequence, the bread-roll ballet, the cabin teetering on the cliff-edge, need no exposition. Ever the restless perfectionist, Chaplin also tweaked the plot and removed the climactic kiss. These days, we have the luxury of choice. It is notable that while Chaplin added music to two more silent features, he never again went as far as he did here. **Pamela Hutchinson**

HEAVEN'S GATE

MICHAEL CIMINO, US, 1980

Heaven's Gate is often linked with Von Stroheim's *Greed* and Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* as an example of what happens when ambitious films are taken away from their creators by crass executives. Yet the real villains of this story are those New York critics who attended a preview of the 219-minute director's cut, and responded with such scorn that Michael Cimino felt compelled to shorten the film. The re-edited version ran to 149 minutes, and despite being a notable commercial flop, its European reviews were significantly more positive than their American equivalents. After being screened at London's National Film Theatre (and released as a panned-and-scanned video), Cimino's original cut was widely acclaimed as a masterpiece. This version, with some minor changes (Cimino has removed the intermission, as well as John Hurt's line "Son of a bitch" has always been a favourite expression in this country"), is now available on Blu-ray and DVD from Criterion in the US and (with a few BBFC-imposed cuts to scenes of cockfighting and horsefalls) *Second Sight* in the UK. **Brad Stevens**

I TRE VOLTI DELLA PAURA/BLACK SABBATH

MARIO BAVA, ITALY, 1963

Mario Bava's horror anthology was his first to be co-produced by American International Pictures, bringing its US kiddie matinee requirements into open conflict with those of the more adult European horror market during production. In

the end, two versions emerged, with different musical scores and story ordering. *Black Sabbath* also differs from the Italian original, which translates as 'The Three Faces of Fear', by having Boris Karloff introduce all three stories rather than book-ending them. The only contemporary story, 'The Telephone', was rewritten to remove all references to its lesbian relationship and to reconceive the heroine's crank caller as a ghost rather than a vengeful prison escapee. AIP also lopped off a brilliant deconstructive postscript featuring Karloff astride a false horse as the camera pulls back to shatter the illusion. Happily, both versions are included on the current Arrow Films Blu-ray. **Tim Lucas**

JOUR DE FETE

JACQUES TATI, FRANCE, 1949/1995

Explanations for the high critical esteem in which Tati's debut feature is held tend to relate to the intricate execution of its jokes, its vivid parochial characterisations and a sound design that emphasises the depth of the frame rather than just its height and width. Watching the film

in black and white or colour would likely yield a similar emotional response, although the latter was the director's preferred version. Tati filmed it simultaneously in Thomson-color – a volatile, untested colour procedure that was tough to replicate – and monochrome, to offer a back-up. When it proved impossible to print colour copies from the Thomson-color negatives, the colour footage had to be abandoned and it was released in black and white. Tati continued to pine for the colour version, however, even returning to the print in 1964, filming extra scenes that would house vivid swatches of colour provided by the artist and animator Paul Grimault. Eventually restored by his daughter Sophie Tatischeff in 1995, there is something about the colour version that enhances Tati's overall ideological vision. With its pale, washed-out hues, harking back to analogue film colourisations of the classic era, the film resembles a faded picture postcard, which is poetic considering its central subject is a blundering postman. One of the focal points of all Tati's feature work is that bittersweet space between the antiquated and

the modern, and as postman François ineptly attempts to parrot the ways of the 'American' postal service, Tati too emulates Hollywood cinema, but strictly in his own small, unique and beautiful fashion. **David Jenkins**

THE JOYLESS STREET

G.W. PABST, GERMANY, 1925

Greta Garbo was already a Hollywood star by the time her last European film, *The Joyless Street*, was first shown in England in January 1927. A grim tale of post-war Vienna, cut into ribbons to meet national requirements everywhere else, it had been rejected by the British censors and had to make do with a single screening at the fabled Film Society. In ordinary circumstances, the coming of sound would have made it unsaleable within a couple of years, leaving the title a fond memory for the few hundred people who had seen it; but Garbo's extraordinary fame earned it a bizarre reprieve, not as an arthouse revival but in London's West End. In June 1935 it was put on at the Empire in Leicester Square, the flagship venue of Garbo's



RIDLEY SCOTT

Ridley Scott's 1982 sci-fi masterwork *Blade Runner* (right) has had a notable afterlife, appearing in at least four distinct guises across its history. What explains this cycle of rebirth? An artist tinkering, re-editing compulsively, worrying composite mattes and model work towards perfection? An attempt to continue courting devotees who kept the film alive after its initial box-office run failed to last more than a few weeks, crushed by the success of *E.T.*? Or is it a belated assertion of creative control, a protracted revenge on obstreperous producers who sullied the filmmaker's initial vision with half-hearted voiceovers and a tacked-on happy ending?

Scott himself might resist the last idea – he has insisted, "I've never been bullied into any cut" – but surely the answer is to be found in some combination of the above. Even on its initial release, *Blade Runner* had two versions, not counting an earlier workprint that was screened to test audiences (and which also had a few screenings in the early 1990s): a US domestic version (at 116 minutes) and the international edition (117 minutes), which retained more profanity and violence. Then, on the film's tenth anniversary in 1992, the so-called 'director's cut' appeared, pieced together by film restorer Michael Arick using notes from Scott, and prompted in part by positive reactions to the recent screenings of the workprint. Harrison Ford's Philip Marlowe-style voiceover was removed, as was the original ending. Crucially, a scene was restored in which the robot hunter Deckard has a vision of a unicorn which, in conjunction with the origami unicorn left for him by a sinister policeman (Edward James Olmos), reinstated the suggestion that Deckard might be a replicant.

These changes brought the film closer in tone to its source material, Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* – a book Scott



reputedly never made it through, choosing to replace Dick's eerie, mournful exploration of identity with a more violent, hard-edged *noir* tone.

But Scott was never entirely happy with the 1992 version either. To mark its 25th anniversary in 2007, a 'final cut' of *Blade Runner* was released, digitally restored, tweaked and re-edited by Sir Ridley himself. It retained many of the extended scenes in the earlier director's cut, while sharpening some special effects.

The success of the later cuts of *Blade Runner* prompted Scott to embrace the notion of extended versions, a move illustrative of the unresolved tensions in his work between aesthetic and commercial instincts, and between supreme visual confidence and a slightly less secure relationship with resolved narratives.

Some of these 'extended editions' have the whiff of having been knocked out to prompt people to buy another DVD. *Gladiator* (2000), *American Gangster* (2007) and *Robin Hood* (2010) have all appeared in largely pointless longer cuts

that add little to the theatrical versions. A longer cut of his misunderstood and problematic *The Counselor* is more interesting; it adds an extra 20 minutes to the film, restoring scenes present in Cormac McCarthy's original script, though it also includes more of a sub-par performance from Richard Cabral as the biker who meets an unfortunate end via decapitation. Cabral's stilted readings of McCarthy's actually very funny, ribald dialogue further compromise the already wayward tone of the film.

However, as with *Blade Runner*, when the longer cut serves its true purpose – reinstating Scott's vision of the film in defiance of producers and test audiences – the results can be transformative. The replaced footage in the director's cut of Scott's 2005 film *Kingdom Of Heaven*, which gives more space to the compelling performances of Edward Norton and Eva Green, fleshes out the film into a substantial epic, and the result is one of Scott's most powerful, underrated works. **Joseph Bevan**

studio MGM, then released nationally. Pabst's original cut was, however, an unwieldy 142 minutes, which was simply too long. Only half of the original was retained, leaving a jerky, incoherent mess that prompted Alexander Korda, Anthony Asquith and Alfred Hitchcock, among other luminaries, to sign a letter of complaint. The reaction of Garbo's fans is a matter for speculation. **Henry K. Miller**

LADY CHATTERLEY

PASCALE FERRAN, FRANCE, 2006

When Pascale Ferran decided to adapt D.H. Lawrence for the screen, the first thing she did was approach Pierre Chevalier, head of fiction at the small French television channel ARTE. Chevalier welcomed the project and ARTE became its primary commercial backer. Such a state of affairs is not unusual in France, where television funding is regularly used to produce a variety of films, but what's rather more idiosyncratic about *Lady Chatterley* is that Ferran and ARTE made two different versions: a 220-minute two-part miniseries that aired on French television in November 2006; and a 168-minute theatrical version that premiered four months later in Berlin and went on to win five Césars. The longer version (available on DVD to international audiences as a 'European version' of the film) pays more attention to its supporting characters but lacks, according to Ferran at least, the "real-time" experience of its heroine's emotional transformation. Appropriately enough the film itself is adapted not from the third and best known of Lawrence's drafts of his infamous novel, but the second version, until recently out of print in the UK but known to French readers as *Lady Chatterley et l'homme des bois*. **Catherine Wheatley**

MALPERTUIS

HARRY KÜMEL, BELGIUM, 1971

The success of camp vampire classic *Daughters of Darkness* (1971) enabled Belgian director Harry Kümel to make his dream project, a lavish adaptation of Jean Ray's fantastical novel about a haunted house in which the bizarre inhabitants plot to inherit their share from a dying patriarch, played by Orson Welles. The film was stunningly shot by Gerry Fisher on fabulous locations in Bruges and Ghent, but Kümel's producers imposed on him an unsympathetic editor who had to work fast to deliver an English version (running 107 minutes) for the Cannes Film Festival. After a poor reception – it was dismissed as just a "horror movie" – *Malpertuis* was mostly seen in even shorter versions until funding from the Belgian Royal Film Archive allowed Kümel in 2002 to complete his 'official' two-hour Flemish version using alternative takes. Missing scenes were restored better to prepare the audience for twists to come, and the dreamy rhythm of the film was much improved, with the only significant loss being the sherry-toned voice of Welles himself. **David Thompson**

METROPOLIS

FRITZ LANG, GERMANY, 1927

Fritz Lang couldn't bear to watch the cut of his dystopian thriller *Metropolis* that was released in

the US, a butchered version that lost 38 minutes from the original German incarnation, partly through censorship but also, supposedly, for simplification. Confirming his fears, H.G. Wells called it "the silliest film" in the *New York Times*. But for decades the film languished unexhibited and we had no *Metropolis* at all. The print that was restored in the early 70s was taken from the American cut, and so Lang's film came to be known as a masterpiece of design, but one with a garbled narrative. The discovery of a near-complete original print in Buenos Aires in 2008 was cause for riotous celebration, and now we can watch the film almost as it was intended to be seen – plotoles neatly filled in. However, Giorgio Moroder's 1984 makeover, with primary-colour washes, deleted intertitles and a pop-rock score, still has devoted fans, and is available on Blu-ray. **Pamela Hutchinson**

MIAMI VICE

MICHAEL MANN, US, 2006

First off – and this is all some people will need to know about the director's cut – you lose the cold opening in the nightclub. When Michael Mann's *Miami Vice* first came to DVD, a friend warned me about the new intro: "It's a boat race. Feels like Mann included it because he felt like he needed to justify all the budget he'd blown through." An inveterate fiddler – *Thief* (1981) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) both exist in different versions from the theatrical release – Mann's other major addition to *Vice* is an intense diner conversation between Tubbs (Jamie Foxx) and his girlfriend and fellow officer Trudy (Naomie Harris). "If your focus is on me," she tells him, "your attention is distracted. You will miss something coming at you" – words repeated nearly verbatim in the tête-à-tête between Chris Hemsworth



JACQUES RIVETTE

Jacques Rivette's preference for longer films over shorter ones has led to many alternative versions over the course of his career, starting with a two-hour version of *L'Amour fou* (1968) which the director disowned, though it premiered in Paris at the same time as the longer, 252-minute cut, and attracted fewer spectators.

The differences between the near 13-hour *Out 1* (1971, pictured above), composed as an eight-part serial, and the 260-minute feature *Out 1: Spectre* (1973), are far more important: the first is a free-form comedy whereas the second, a tightly edited nightmare fashioned out of the same footage, took Rivette a year to put together, with a separate editor. Most fascinating of all is the fact that the same shots sometimes have substantially different meanings and impacts. Fortunately, both versions are now available in a lovely German box-set from Absolut Medien in which the serial has optional English subtitles. Together and separately, these two films remain

Rivette's key achievement, along with *L'Amour fou* and 1974's *Celine and Julie Go Boating*. (For the latter, Rivette even signed a contract stipulating that his comedy wouldn't run over two hours, but then everyone who saw the 185-minute workprint agreed that it shouldn't be cut.)

At least three other (and later) Rivette features exist in shorter and longer versions, all edited by him: *Love on the Ground* (*L'Amour par terre*, 1983, 170 mins and 120 mins), *La Belle Noiseuse* (1991, 237 minutes; the two-hour version is called *Divertimento*), and *Va savoir* (*Who Knows?*, 2001, 220 minutes and 154 minutes). I haven't watched the longer version of the last of these – according to Rivette critic Mary M. Wiles, it was only seen by the 1,734 spectators who attended its seven-week run at Le Cinéma du Panthéon in Paris during the spring of 2002. But I can testify that the other two features feel much shorter (as well as sexier) in their longer versions, suggesting that as a general rule, the longer Rivette's features run, the better they turn out to be. **Jonathan Rosenbaum**

and Tang Wei in Mann's *Blackhat*. None of the additions detract, even the much-debated catamaran race, a blindingly bright prologue to a movie that is for the most part nocturnal and overhung with storm clouds. **Nick Pinkerton**

NAPOLEON

ABEL GANCE, FRANCE, 1927

There have been more versions of *Napoléon* than territories in his empire. This groundbreaking film was premiered twice: once, rapturously received, at the Paris Opera running for four hours, then the nine-and-a-half hour *version définitive* in the Apollo. Gance preferred a six-and-a-half-hour cut, but *Napoléon* was cut and cut again for international release. He reused footage in other films and even shot a sound version. Enter Kevin Brownlow, who starting with a tiny 9.5mm scrap, acquired in his teens, has attempted to reconstitute the whole film, a heroic quest that has spanned the decades and is a worthy rival to Gance's mission to shoot this masterpiece, if not to Napoleon's own epic trajectory. Its length and its stunning 'triptych' finale make screenings a rarity. Most fans consider Brownlow's restoration definitive, and Carl Davis's score a triumph, flocking to its rare 35mm outings. However, an alternative restoration by Costa-Gavras and Francis Ford Coppola is being digitally prepped for release in 2017, with an adaptation of Coppola's father's score. **Pamela Hutchinson**

NEBO ZOVIYOT/BATTLE BEYOND THE SUN

MIKHAIL KARZHUKOV & ALEKSANDR KOZYR, USSR/US, 1959/1962

In the early 1960s, Roger Corman purchased US rights to a handful of Russian science-fiction films that were blessed with exceptional spaceship model effects but otherwise lacked elements that might appeal to American drive-in crowds. Mikhail Karzhukov and Aleksandr Kozyr's *Nebo Zoviyot* (1959), an inspiring tale of a Soviet space mission that beats the Americans to Mars, was handed over to a young Francis Ford Coppola (credited as Thomas Colchart), who painstakingly removed hammer-and-sickle insignia from the spaceships and added a prologue which established a future where the world is divided into North and South rather than East and West. The original Russian good guys become Yank-sounding Southies. In addition, Coppola cut out a symbolic finish in which a golden astronaut symbolises hope for the future, and replaced it with an extraordinary model sequence involving two toothy monsters which resemble male and female genitalia having a fight that involves vigorous penetration. The results were so successful that Corman did it again, hiring Peter Bogdanovich to turn Pavel Klushantsev's *Planeta Bur/Planet of Storms* (1962) into *Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women* (1968). **Kim Newman**

THE NEW WORLD

TERRENCE MALICK, US, 2005

Terrence Malick's epic about the discovery of America and the romance between explorer John Smith (Colin Farrell) and Virginia Indian Pocahontas (Q'orianka Kilcher) exists in three versions. Initially, Malick released a 150-minute cut that played in New York and Los Angeles for



a one-week Oscar-qualifying run. (This version is no longer widely available.) He then went back to the editing room; the resulting theatrical cut runs to 135 minutes. The differences mainly have to do with rhythm: the 150-minute version ebbs and flows while the 135-minute cut is more dreamily propulsive. Finally, in 2008, Malick put out a 172-minute extended cut of the film on DVD, which adds some poetic intertitles, features a more intricate and surreal sound design, and restores several subplots (notably one involving a mute Indian who wanders into the European settlers camp) that make an already masterful movie even richer. **Keith Uhlich**

NIGHTBREED

CLIVE BARKER, US, 1990

"The *Star Wars* of monster movies" was Clive Barker's stated vision for his second film as writer-director, an adaptation of his own novel *Cabal*, about a supernatural secret society of outcasts, mutants and misfits lurking in the Midwestern backwoods. But the version that ultimately limped into cinemas was a full 40 minutes shorter than Barker's workprint, retaining almost nothing of the director's subversive vision. It wasn't until 2012 that an unauthorised 155-minute version – the 'Cabal Cut' – was finally screened to fans, prompting the director to revisit the film and deliver his own two-hour director's cut, junking much of the original version in the process. The result would never have been the box-office triumph Barker so badly wanted – it's tonally uneven, weakly characterised and defiantly, uncompromisingly weird – but *Nightbreed* remains a unique piece of work, an epic of carnival grotesquerie pitched somewhere between Bosch, Fellini and Spielberg. **Tom Huddleston**

ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA

SERGIO LEONE, US/ITALY, 1983

Sergio Leone's epic gangster saga, flashing

backwards and forwards from the 1920s through to the 1960s in the lives of a group of Jewish New York mobsters, was never released in a version true to the director's original conception. While Europe saw a cut of 228 minutes, in the US Warner Bros took fright and re-edited the film into a chronological narrative that ran for 139 minutes, an abomination that failed both critically and commercially. The 'European' cut, in which the story is linked by ageing gangster Noodles (Robert De Niro) revisiting the scenes of his youth to track down the friend who betrayed him, thereafter has held sway. But it was always known certain actors had gone missing (such as Louise Fletcher as a cemetery director) and events left more ambiguous than intended. In 2012 a longer cut of 251 minutes was unveiled at Cannes, courtesy of the Cineteca di Bologna, with some tantalising scenes reinstated in spite of the poor quality of the existing source material. Though still available on an Italian Blu-ray, that version has apparently now been withdrawn pending further restoration work. **David Thompson**

THE OPENING OF MISTY BEETHOVEN

RADLEY METZGER, US, 1976

In the sex-film business, the practice of producing multiple cuts to fit different markets has been endemic for decades, but for the most part these merely adjusted the explicitness of the sex scenes to match local community standards: during the mid-1970s, the so-called 'porno chic' era, more censorious Britain invariably saw the milder versions, at least in public cinemas. Normally this would have been cause for severe disappointment on the part of the viewer, but when writer-director-producer-distributor Radley Metzger turned to hardcore pornography under the pseudonym Henry Paris, he also produced alternative softcore cuts of films such as *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* and *Barbara Broadcast* (1977), which



Mob rules: The first two parts of *The Godfather* trilogy were reassembled in chronological order for TV

THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

The broadcast requirements of television have resulted in badly bowdlerised cuts of some films, but also some superior longer versions. **By Brad Stevens**

Television has often been seen as cinema's enemy, seducing audiences away from the big screen while treating films with little respect, panning and scanning the widescreen ones, censoring the modern ones, and cutting certified classics to make them fit a time slot. But it should be pointed out that television sometimes rescued missing footage, in certain cases motivated by genuine cinephilia; the BBC restored Kurosawa Akira's *Seven Samurai* and Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard* at a time when these films could otherwise only be seen uncut in their countries of origin. Yet longer versions also appear to have been obtained by chance. The BBC used to show a transfer of Walter Hill's *The Warriors* that included a pre-credits sequence absent from most prints. And Channel 4 recently played a cut of Fede Alvarez's *Evil Dead* remake that ran four minutes longer than the international DVD, Blu-ray and theatrical editions.

A few films were deliberately made in two versions: long ones, to be shown in several parts, for television, and shorter ones for theatrical release. Several Ingmar Bergman titles belong in this category – *Face to Face*, *Scenes from a Marriage*, *Fanny* and *Alexander*

Many American studios created special TV editions of their films, eliminating violence, nudity and bad language

– as do Francesco Rosi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* and Claude Chabrol's *The Blood of Others*. Few who have had the opportunity to compare different versions of these works find the abbreviated cuts preferable.

Many American studios created special television editions of their films, eliminating violence, nudity and bad language while padding out running times with scenes from the cutting-room floor; examples include the first three Superman films with Christopher Reeve, *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid*, *Repo Man*, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, *Midway*, *Jaws*, *Videodrome*, *The Keep*, *Joe*, *The Towering Inferno*, *Prince of the City*, *Sharky's Machine*, *Diary of a Mad Housewife* and *The Hired Hand*.

Perhaps the most important of these variants is *The Godfather: A Novel for Television* (first broadcast in 1977), which reassembled Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* and *The Godfather Part II* in chronological order (beginning with the sequel's flashback sections), adding a significant amount of previously unseen material. This heavily censored TV version eventually became the source of the DVD's deleted scenes section, which explains why some censorship cuts are still evident on the disc: a deleted scene in which young Vito Corleone (Robert De Niro) cuts the throat of Don Ciccio's thug has obviously been shortened, and we now hear James Caan say, "The old man would have my neck," though close attention to his lip movements reveals that what he actually said was, "The old man would have my ass." **©**

© offered additional scenes and dialogue as compensation for the sex scenes being drastically pruned (both temporally and visually). Since Metzger was just about the wittiest screenwriter working in porn, for once the exchange seemed halfway fair. **Michael Brooke**

PAT GARRETT & BILLY THE KID SAM PECKINPAH, US, 1973

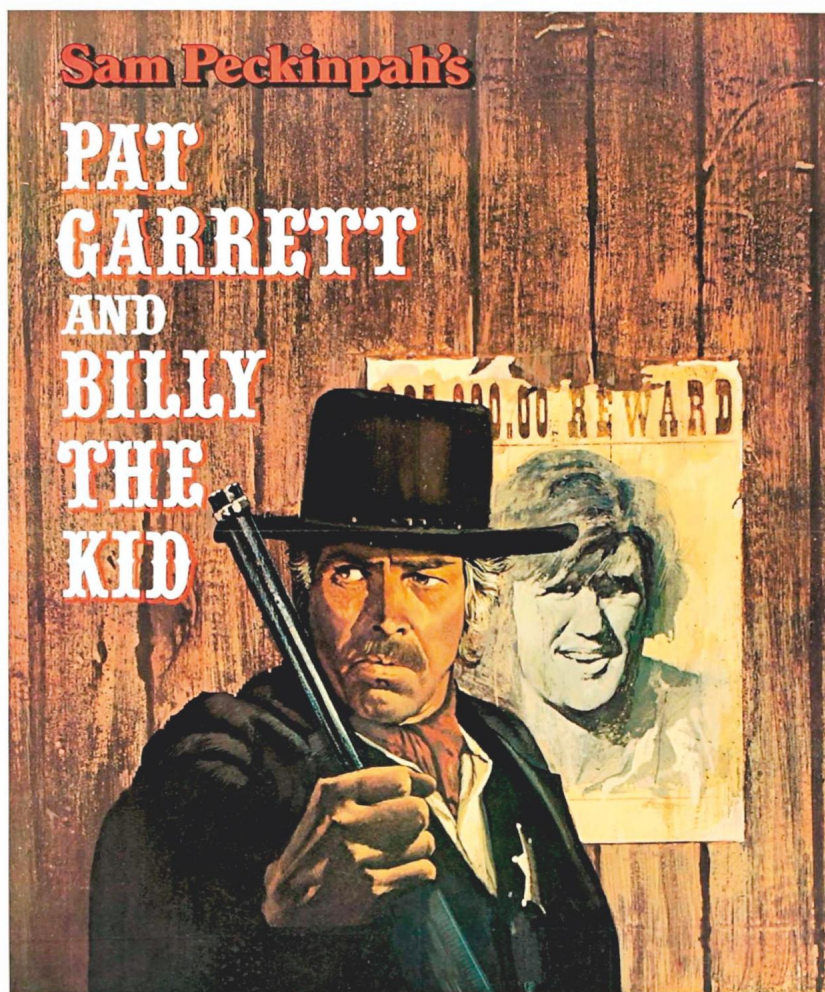
When *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* opened in 1973, critics had no doubt that the version they were watching bore little resemblance to the film conceived by Sam Peckinpah. Virtually every review mentioned the director's well-publicised dispute with MGM, which resulted in the loss of a framing story involving the death of Pat Garrett, and noted that several actors who participated in the shoot – including Elisha Cook Jr, Aurora Clavell and Barry Sullivan – did not appear on screen (though glimpses of them remained in the trailer, and some of their scenes were restored to the television version). After Peckinpah's death, a preview cut was discovered and released: it restored most of the excised material, but was still missing Aurora Clavell's appearance as Garrett's wife, and eliminated a section (present in the theatrical edition) in which Garrett interrogates a prostitute played by Rutanya Alda. Paul Seydor subsequently assembled another cut for DVD, restoring the footage of Alda and Clavell, but removing several moments from the preview print, notably Elisha Cook's cameo. None of the available variants is completely satisfying, but taken together they represent a major achievement. **Brad Stevens**

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA RUPERT JULIAN, US, 1925/1929

Between January and October 1925, three versions of Universal's troubled adaptation of Gaston Leroux's thriller were previewed to the US public, none very satisfactorily. The first was a dark gothic melodrama directed by Rupert Julian; the second a lighter, more 'popular' version with romantic comedy elements added by Edward Sedgwick; lastly, there was a composite of the two, which the announced composer Gustav Hinrichs could not view in time to score properly, leaving the musical accompaniment to be patched together from existing pieces. Today, the film survives in its third version, and as a curious Eastman House archived composite which blends that version with scenes shot in 1929 for a now lost 'talkie' version (only its sound discs endure). Actors Mary Philbin and Norman Kerry reprised their roles for the sound footage, while scenes of recently deceased Lon Chaney were left untouched, albeit augmented with new shots bringing the Phantom's shadow into contact with the sound actors or addressing the audience directly. The 2003 Image Entertainment DVD made an attempt to synchronise the sound discs to the Eastman House composite, with flawed results. **Tim Lucas**

PLATFORM JIA ZHANGKE, CHINA, 2000

Working as an 'underground' independent, off the Beijing Film Bureau's radar, Jia Zhangke got a huge lift from the international success of his debut *Pickpocket* (*Xiao Wu*, 1997). So his



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follow-up *Platform* was a massively ambitious project, chronicling China's transition from the fag-end of Maoism to the beginnings of a state-capitalist economy through the fate of a song-and-dance troupe in Shanxi. The original version, premiered in Venice, ran for about four hours; most foreigners didn't get it, and sales were few. Hence the current three-hour cut, designed to make it easier to distribute. But Jia still talks about revisiting the film to produce a definitive version. Giving himself the time and space to rethink his films is anyway part of his process. He came up with a new ending for 2013's *A Touch of Sin* (the soft-drink bottling plant in Shanxi, the open-air opera performance) and shot it little more than a month before the premiere in Cannes. **Tony Rayns**

THE PROMISED LAND ANDRZEJ WAJDA, POLAND, 1974

Running nearly three hours at its premiere, Andrzej Wajda's sweeping portrait of the ruthless capitalists driving Poland's breakneck industrial revolution secured him his first Oscar nomination, but it was attacked at home for being pornographic and abroad for being anti-Semitic, the latter charge thought to have scuppered its international distribution (even though it's easy enough to counter: the film's Jewish characters may behave appallingly, but so does everybody else). Believing that the film's core message about the excesses of unfettered capitalism was even more relevant after communism's collapse, Wajda released a 'director's cut' in

2000 that was 25 minutes shorter, and which seemed to directly address the earlier criticisms. For more than a decade this and the four-part TV miniseries version were all that was easily available, but Wajda seems to have changed his mind of late, approving a high-definition restoration of the original cut. **Michael Brooke**

¡QUE VIVA MEXICO! SERGEI EISENSTEIN, MEXICO

The one thing that *¡Que Viva México!* lacks is a director's cut, since the changing Soviet political climate of the early 1930s prevented Sergei Eisenstein from ever editing the 200,000 feet of film he had shot in Mexico between 1930-32. The expedition to make a six-part epic had been financed by socialist author Upton Sinclair, but when relations soured he refused to send the material to Moscow, and started to sell it off. Among at least five versions, *Thunder over Mexico* (1933) was a hack job by future Tarzan producer Sol Lesser, while the Eisenstein biographer Marie Seton made her *Time in the Sun* version in 1940 and scholar Jay Leyda assembled a 'study version' of the footage in 1959. Back in Russia, Eisenstein's co-director Grigori Alexandrov made a vulgarised version in 1979 and Oleg Kovalov produced his lurid *Sergei Eisenstein: Mexican Fantasy* (1998). Debate continues over whether Eisenstein's original scenario could still be followed, and what his choices for sound would have been. **Ian Christie**

THE RED AND THE WHITE MIKLOS JANCZO, HUNGARY, 1967

Following his breakthrough *The Round-Up* (1965), Miklós Jancsó was hired to direct a Hungarian-Soviet co-production that was intended to form part of the Russian Revolution's 50th anniversary celebrations. A Mosfilm memo reveals Russian qualms even before shooting, reporting that Jancsó "is a typical representative of auteur filmmaking. This movement is much more extreme in Hungary than in our country. Even at this point we regret to disappoint those comrades who expect a huge celebratory film for the anniversary. This will not happen." It duly didn't, but Mosfilm cobbled together an ostensibly Soviet-friendly version anyway, removing 20 minutes, deleting entire scenes that were perceived to be either off-message or excessively ambiguous, and crudely chopping nudity and other contentious material out of the middle of Jancsó's elegantly elongated takes. Unsurprisingly, international distributors favoured Jancsó's own cut, although both are included (with English subtitles) on the Hungarian DVD edition. **Michael Brooke**

REPO MAN ALEX COX, UK, 1984

The phrase "Flip you, melon farmer!" may have become popular shorthand for the heartless, artless TV-friendly bowdlerisation of great movies, but let's not forget that director Alex Cox personally oversaw the recut and dubbing of his scuzzily magnificent Los Angeles punk debut in which the phrase was first uttered. The result is, unexpectedly, an improvement, with this wild, weirdly appropriate nursery-school street slang adding a

ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

↩ unique edge of surreality to the film's already off-beam pseudo-apocalyptic landscape. The TV cut also allowed Cox to reinsert two key scenes that were inexplicably removed from the theatrical edit: one in which Bud (Harry Dean Stanton) furiously trashes a phone booth with a baseball bat, and a frazzled exchange outside a gas station in which we learn that "vended food contains all the necessary nutrients for survival". **Tom Huddleston**

VIDEODROME

DAVID CRONENBERG, US, 1983

The straightest sex in David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* underwent some modest cuts before winning its R rating from the MPAA, its unrated director's cut withheld until the film debuted on home video. But its theatrical trimmings were nothing compared with the radical, family-friendly retelling proposed by the MCA TV version, shown on select cable outlets through the mid-1990s. The already short film was disembowelled to such an extent that its beginning and ending had to be padded with leisurely new titles superimposed over surrealistic paintings. MCA TV's version restores much of Debbie Harry's truncated performance (whittled down as Cronenberg rewrote his story in the editing room), depicting her as an ally of, and occasional replacement for, the film's corporate villain Barry Convex. Recovered dialogue scenes unmask the US military as the architects of Videodrome and a conclusive voiceover confirms the foregoing mess as "a political thriller". Some fascinating fragments here, but Cronenberg rightly disowns this. **Tim Lucas**

THE WARRIORS

WALTER HILL, US, 1979

Apparently director Walter Hill saw problems to be fixed in his 1979 film about a Coney Island-based gang fighting their way home from The Bronx, in particular the tenuous attachment of the material to its "comic-book origins" and "historical connections to the Greeks" – he discussed these in the introduction to the 2005 DVD rerelease of the film, which appeared to cross-promote a new *The Warriors* beat-'em-up from Rockstar Games. This 'Ultimate Director's Cut' realises Hill's stated original intention to use interstitial 'splash panels' to transition between scenes in the live-action narrative, and includes a corny prologue that explicitly draws out the parallel between the Warriors' quest and the aftermath of the Battle of Cunaxa in 401 BC as described in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, an element in Sol Yurick's source novel. Even the one comic-booky effect that did make it into the original, the Kurosawa-esque 'wipe' transitions, have been embellished here. The interruptions are rare enough to do minimal damage – though the introduction of the Baseball Furies is totally mishandled – but no one except Walter Hill could think of them as an improvement. **Nick Pinkerton**

THE WICKER MAN

ROBIN HARDY, UK, 1973

Robin Hardy's British folk horror *policier* exists in a bewildering variety of versions. Hardy made a 102-minute rough assembly but distributor



ORSON WELLES

Who ever said Orson Welles's filmography has to be neat? But one rudimentary way of bringing some order would be to distinguish between nine films he completed to his satisfaction (*Citizen Kane*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *The Fountain of Youth*, *The Trial*, *Chimes at Midnight*, *The Immortal Story*, *F for Fake*, and *Filming Othello*) and nine others he didn't complete and/or lost control of (*The Magnificent Ambersons*, *It's All True*, *The Stranger*, *The Lady from Shanghai*, *Mr. Arkadin* aka *Confidential Report*, *Touch of Evil*, *Don Quixote*, *The Deep*, *The Other Side of the Wind*). Yet even this isn't as neat as it sounds, since he completed two separate versions of both *Macbeth* (1948 and 1950 – the second at the studio's request, to eliminate the Scottish accents and shorten the running time by two reels; both are available today in France) and *Othello* (1952 and 1953).

Neither *Othello*, alas, is commercially available anywhere – only an alteration of the second version, edited for the US release and three minutes shorter than its predecessor, with different sound effects and music added in stereo in 1992. According to Welles specialist François Thomas, Welles redubbed

about half his lines in the second version, and Desdemona's voice is dubbed by Gudrun Ure, who played the part in Welles's London stage production of 1951, and not Suzanne Cloutier, whom we see (and also hear in the first version).

With *Mr. Arkadin* we have multiple versions, none approved by Welles (pictured above on the set of *Touch of Evil*). The recent 'comprehensive' cut tries to incorporate as much footage as possible while ignoring Welles's own stipulation that the editing matters more than anything else; the other two versions, dating from the 50s, are both closer to Welles's original design, either in terms of sound editing (*Confidential Report*) or flashbacks (the 'Corinth' version).

With *Touch of Evil* we have the original release (1958), a longer preview version uncovered in the mid-70s, and a 1998 re-edit by Walter Murch (on which I served as consultant), the latter based on a lengthy studio memo written by Welles about how the studio might improve "their" (not his) picture. The latter distinction is important. To assume that any completion of an unfinished Welles film could ever conform to his original intentions means to ignore the likelihood that his intentions remained in a state of perpetual flux. **Jonathan Rosenbaum** Ⓒ

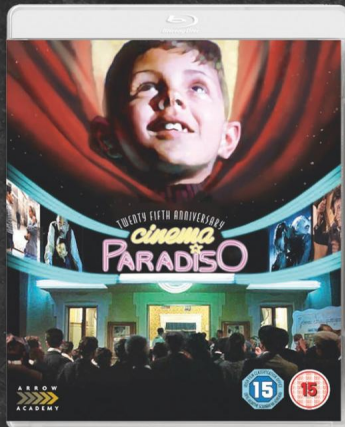
British Lion had editor Eric Boyd-Perkins prepare an 88-minute version for release on a double bill with *Don't Look Now*. Almost immediately *The Wicker Man* became a textbook martyred cult film – it's even *about* a cult – with Hardy and others lamenting the loss of many sequences. Though the original materials were reputedly buried under a motorway, the rough cut surfaced and several refinements of it, with varying levels of involvement of and approval by Hardy, have been issued over the years. By

the time any of these appeared, the film was so well known that the extended versions felt a little protracted – after all, Anthony Shaffer's canny script builds up to a twist most audiences now knew. Some extended versions include plodding exposition scenes that Hardy has dropped from others and none are as well-paced or edited as Boyd-Perkins's very effective cut. In this case, the 'restorations' all have moments of interest but it's the studio version that justly won plaudits in the first place. **Kim Newman** Ⓒ

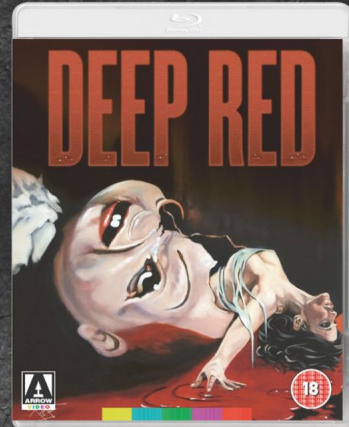
DIRECTOR'S CUTS AND ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS FROM ARROW VIDEO AND ARROW ACADEMY



AIP VERSION
& ITALIAN VERSION



THEATRICAL CUT
& DIRECTOR'S CUT



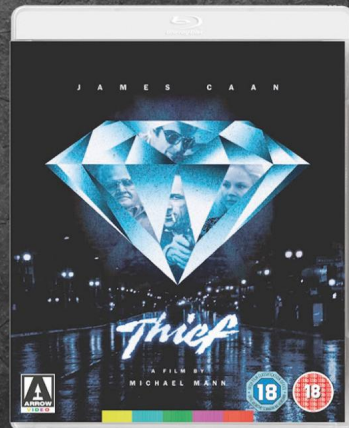
INTERNATIONAL VERSION
& DIRECTOR'S CUT



DIRECTOR'S CUT
& PRODUCER'S CUT



AIP
& ITALIAN VERSIONS



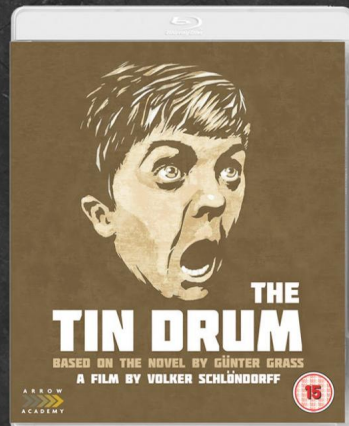
THEATRICAL CUT
& DIRECTOR'S CUT



THEATRICAL CUT
& DIRECTOR'S CUT



AIP, INTERNATIONAL
& ITALIAN VERSIONS



THEATRICAL CUT
& DIRECTOR'S CUT



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ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER

Xavier Dolan's first film, 'I Killed My Mother', was an autobiographical cri de coeur against the woman who had borne him. Five years on, the prolific director's fifth feature 'Mommy' finally offers the mother figure the chance to gain her revenge

By Ben Walters

Wunderkind is an overused word but Xavier Dolan has made a lot of impressive work at a very young age. The French-Canadian filmmaker turns 26 on March 20, the date of the UK release of *Mommy*, his fifth feature in five years; he shortly begins shooting his Hollywood-set English-language debut, *The Death and Life of John F. Donovan*. As well as taking writing, producing and directing credits on all his features, Dolan edits, oversees wardrobe and music choices, and often stars. He even handles the English subtitles himself. Already an established Cannes darling – *Mommy* won the Jury Prize there last year – his shelf is groaning with more than 30 other international awards. As a child actor, he had a head start in the industry but it's a rare achievement nonetheless.

In Dolan's films, fraught domestic relationships are anatomised with expressionistic flair. "They're very intense movies with intense characters shouting at each other," as he puts it when we meet in London to discuss *Mommy*. In the film, Anne Dorval stars as Die, a savvy working-class widow in Quebec struggling to deal with her loveable but disruptive 15-year-old son Steve (Antoine Olivier Pilon) following his release from a detention centre. Suzanne Clément plays Kyla, the withdrawn teacher across the street with whom the precarious pair



MOTHER NATURE
Anne Dorval plays Die (right), a savvy working-class widow in Quebec struggling to deal with her loveable but disruptive son Steve, played by Antoine Olivier Pilon (above), following his release from a detention centre

establish a kind of improvised family unit.

The film has been hailed as a breakthrough for Dolan, a step back from the formal exuberance that has enchanted many, and alienated others, in favour of a more naturalistic approach. “I’ve changed,” he says. “Not fundamentally. The themes are the same: mother love, suburbanite lifestyle, musical episodes of freedom. That *modus operandi* has not changed.” So what has? “The use of cinematic effects like slow motion. *Mommy* was about giving full control to the characters. Every artistic choice, every lens we’re going to choose, every movement was about, ‘Are we upstaging the character? Are we overshadowing, are we mocking, are we disrespecting the character?’ It was always about the character.”

In this respect, and others, *Mommy* is less a departure from Dolan’s earlier work than a development. There are obvious narrative links to his 2009 debut, *I Killed My Mother* (*J’ai tué ma mère*), in which Dolan himself plays Hubert, a gay 16-year-old at loggerheads with his single mother but supported by a teacher, played by Dorval and Clément respectively. The new film’s triangular dynamic recalls *Heartbeats* (*Les Amours imaginaires*, 2010), in which two friends (Dolan’s Frank and Monia Chokri’s Marie) jostle for the affections of narcissistic newcomer Nico (Niels Schneider). *Mommy* develops a curiosity about aspect ratio first explored in the quasi-operatic *Laurence Anyways* (2012), which traces the relationship between lovers Laurence (Melvil Poupaud) and Fred (Clément) over the decade during which Laurence transitions from male to female. And it follows *Tom at the Farm* (*Tom à la ferme*, 2013) – a Hitchcockian thriller starring Dolan as an urbanite who finds himself marooned at his late lover’s family farm – in embracing a leaner, less flamboyant *mise en scène*.

Mommy’s most *outré* element might be narrative rather than formal. Thanks to a fictional law introduced in the film’s otherwise realistic version of Canada, parents enjoy the “moral and legal right” simply to deposit an unruly child at a hospital. This no-strings solution to the challenges of childcare serves as more than a plot device. As a more or less absurd simplification of the vicissitudes of familial obligation, it throws into contrast the real and intractable dilemma that underpins each of Dolan’s pictures: how can people with conflicting emotional needs love each other? “All the movies are about that,” the director says. “*Tom at the Farm* is about how people can love each other under the same roof, *Heartbeats* is about how people can love each other in a triangular dynamic and *Laurence Anyways* is about how people can love each other over the course of time.” Solutions are not necessarily proposed: sometimes all that is left to do is be silent together, acknowledging the impasse.

Most fraught of all is the bond between mother and son – a dynamic found in all of Dolan’s films, and dominating *I Killed My Mother* and *Mommy*. “Back in the days of *I Killed My Mother*, I felt like I wanted to punish my mom,” Dolan has written. “Only five years have passed ever since, and I believe that, through *Mommy*, I’m now seeking her revenge.” He has spoken of his difficult relationship with his own mother and resentment that his juvenile acting career was disrupted when he, like Hubert, was sent away to boarding school.

“You have no idea how close Hubert is to me,” Dolan says. Still, he was dismayed when some used the character’s petulance as a stick with which to beat the precocious filmmaker. “I think people still have a problem with me because they associate me with the first thing they saw me in,” he says, “which is that brat on screen

with that awful hair-do.” *Mommy*, he insists, is “diametrically opposed” to *I Killed My Mother*: rather than a tongue-in-cheek diary of bourgeois adolescent vexation, this is the story of a disadvantaged woman struggling to cope with a mentally ill teenager. “One is a sentimental comedy and the other is a family drama,” he insists. “It’s socially engaged and an existential crisis.”

What the films share, along with all Dolan’s stories, is a willingness to embrace his characters’ ambivalence. Whatever the set-up, they are rarely simply sympathetic or unsympathetic: Hubert is shrewd and sensitive as well as being a brat while his mother is patient and loving as well as flighty and thoughtless; in *Mommy*, Steve is racist and violent as well as charming and hopeful while Die is both determined and out of her depth. Still, it’s true that mothers tend to be resilient and fierce while fathers are feckless or useless, if not absent or dead. And the nuclear family, when glimpsed, is a site of frustration: both *Mommy*’s Kyla and *Laurence Anyways*’ Fred chafe at the banality of life with a husband and child. Fred – the one character in Dolan’s films whom we witness becoming a mother – is an intriguing case study in familial ambivalence. “I love you more than my son,” she tells Laurence, yet also reports “thinking about my son 24/7”. One wonders how the child feels about it all.

Recognising domestic powerplay as the basic register of Dolan’s pictures is helpful when considering the swooning aestheticism for which he is known. Opinion



is divided but I’m a believer. Sure, there’s a sense of the adolescent scrapbook in the films’ carefully collated *objets* and icons: this tigerskin lamp, that floral plate, those posters of James Dean, Audrey Hepburn and the Mona Lisa, or evocations of Jean Cocteau and Pedro Almodóvar, Gus Van Sant and Wong Kar Wai, Pierre et Gilles and *Jules et Jim*. Why not revel in the exquisitely considered decor and palette, the elegantly poised compositions, the luxuriant slow motion in which characters stride, dance or brawl, or the expressionistically inserted deluges of water, laundry or marshmallows?

It’s not, however, only a matter of taste for taste’s sake. This aestheticism does important character work in these worlds of tightly bound domesticity. Fights frequently erupt in the confines of kitchens or cars but when Hubert and his mother both ‘get’ that tigerskin lamp, we feel there might be hope for them after all. There’s a consoling degree of control in the regimented ritual of taking tea, or placing a pleasing book in just the right spot. This tendency is strongest in matters sartorial: clothes are a language here. When, in *Heartbeats*, Frank and Marie arrive at Nico’s birthday party in achingly stylish ensembles, their shared taste and mutual rivalry tell us they have far more in common with



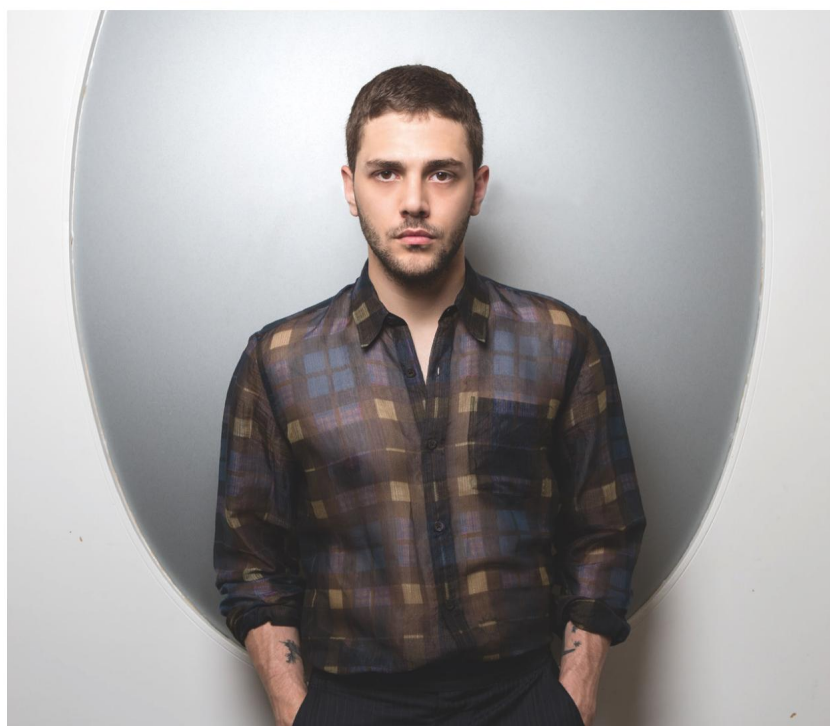
one another than with the object of their vain affections or his slovenly friends. It sets them apart – but makes them absurd as well as chic. “Take a movie like *Heartbeats*, whose mandate is purely artificial,” Dolan says. “People wrote, ‘There’s a problem. It’s a case of style over substance.’ It’s a movie *about* style over substance. It doesn’t mean that each scene shouldn’t lose about ten seconds – each of them, all through the movie – but still...”

So yes, it’s possible to use decor and costume thoughtfully and still take it a bit far. In the case of *Laurence Anyways*, the result is not just indulgent but troubling: the film risks presenting transgender experience as essentially superficial, or at least externally focused. Laurence accuses an interlocutor of failing to look her in the eye but the film itself shows limited interest in the lived reality of transgender experience. Its focus is on Laurence’s relationship to hair and clothes, loved ones and employers rather than the transformation of the character’s psychological subjectivity or physical person. The new queer family that takes Laurence under its wing, meanwhile, seems less like a group of characters than an excuse for exuberant visual arrangements. Gender identity here ultimately feels like a device put to the service of a story that’s really about becoming – Laurence’s transition from male to female is less convincing than her move from teacher to poet, employee to artist.

Tom at the Farm recoils in the opposite direction, offering a fascinating case study in inverted sartorialism: Tom’s shucking of his stylish city duds for hand-me-down farmwear marks the start of a disturbing loss of personal identity. The change is analogous to the film’s own pared-down style: compared with its peacocking predecessors, it embraces the simpler, more robust form of the thriller. Similarly, the effervescent electro and New Romantic-heavy soundtracks of the earlier features give way to Gabriel Yared’s brilliantly Herrmannesque score. The sense of domestic entrapment that troubles all of Dolan’s films metastasises here into a literal struggle for survival in which the consolations of taste are of limited use: if Dolan’s earlier films deployed aestheticism as a bulwark against humiliation, here it is brushed aside by naked violence.

This too is a development rather than a departure. Violence is always present in Dolan’s pictures, sometimes visited upon protagonists from outside but more often, and more powerfully, unleashed as an ugly extension of the needful dynamic between loved ones. “I know that violence,” Dolan says. “I know that rage. I have it in me. When I was five, six, seven, eight, I had these great outbursts. I would get into fights with other kids in the schoolyard and gratuitously hit them and it was problematic. Then it became latent and now I guess I’ve decided to express violence through movies.” *Tom at the Farm* goes further than its predecessors in melding the violent and the erotic: Tom’s interaction with his late lover’s brother Francis (Pierre-Yves Cardinal) is a sadomasochistic courtship, a tangled tango of lust and loss. “Harder,” Tom gasps as Francis’s fingers close on his throat. “You’re the boss,” Francis pants.

During this scene, the film’s aspect ratio narrows to a tight letterbox for a couple of minutes, as it does at two other points during which the pair’s interaction reaches a pitch of heightened animal intensity. This wasn’t Dolan’s first experiment with expressive aspect ratio:



I know that rage. I have it in me. When I was five, six, seven, eight, I would get into fights with other kids. Now I guess I’ve decided to express violence through movies

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS
Xavier Dolan (above) admits that while *Mommy* explores similar themes to his previous work, he has toned down some of the exuberance of his style in favour of a more naturalistic approach that better serves the needs of the characters

Laurence Anyways was shot in 4:3, befitting the story’s 1980s setting; and, around the same time, Dolan shot ‘College Boy’, a music video for the band Indochine, in an almost square ratio. Dolan would use the same format for *Mommy* (and cast the video’s star – Antoine Olivier Pilon, who had briefly appeared in *Laurence Anyways* – as Steve). To Dolan, the 1:1 look conveys both constriction and heroism, and affords an opportunity for diegetic fun. Just as Steve is able to press play on his stereo and select *Mommy*’s soundtrack of Oasis, Céline Dion and Counting Crows, at his most optimistic he’s able to reach his hands out and stretch the picture’s square ratio into widescreen. It’s exhilarating but it doesn’t last long.

This moment aside, *Mommy* is short on conspicuous aestheticism. Dolan says he wants to make sure his formal choices are more reflective of his characters’ experience. “I certainly ask myself more questions,” he says. “I’m trying to slowly drift towards a style which is storytelling first and foremost – storytelling through characters and actors. And I’m quite happy with that because my passion is acting.”

Acting, after all, was how Dolan’s first came to the industry – as a child on set, “missing school and hanging out with adults who talked about their sex lives and crack addiction,” as he once put it – and he still takes roles in others’ projects. It’s fitting, then, that his next picture is about actors. In *The Death and Life of John F. Donovan*, Kit Harington (*Games of Thrones*’ Jon Snow) plays a Hollywood star whose correspondence with an 11-year-old actor is seized on by a malicious journalist (Jessica Chastain) to the consternation of Donovan’s cagey mother (Susan Sarandon), his protective agent (Kathy Bates) and the boy’s concerned mother. The story allows Dolan to explore the emotions of fandom, the mechanics of the film industry and the effects of sudden youthful success. And the cast includes not one but three mother figures. 📺



Mommy is released in UK cinemas on 26 March and is reviewed on page 81

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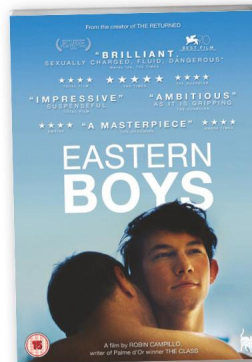
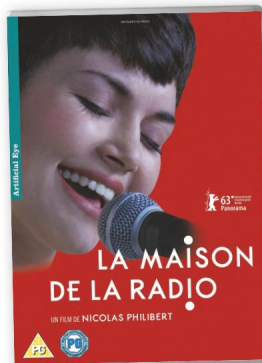
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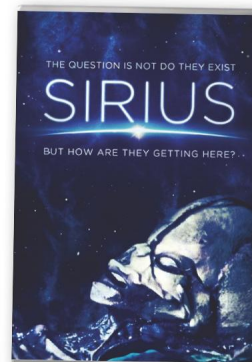
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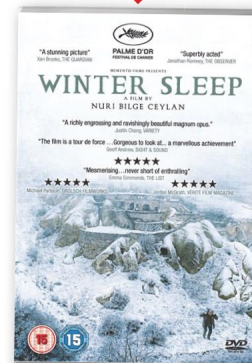


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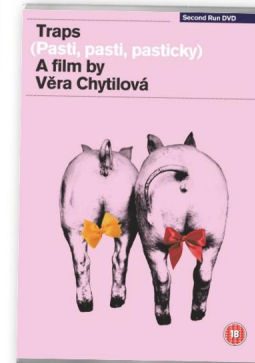


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PASSION PROJECT

Takahata Isao's *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* is a lamentation for time's swift passage, animated in a fleet brushstroke style that exudes speed and spontaneity. 'When you're drawing fast there's passion,' Takahata explains. 'With a carefully finished product that passion gets lost.'



SLOW ON THE DRAW

Studio Ghibli co-founder Takahata Isao has a reputation as an implacable perfectionist – and with its rare blend of raw line-drawings and watercolours, *'The Tale of the Princess Kaguya'*, his first movie in 14 years, took eight years and a kindly patron to make

By Nick Bradshaw

The plan was to release *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* in Japan on the same day as *The Wind Rises*, 25 years after the double-bill of Takahata Isao's *Grave of the Fireflies* and Miyazaki Hayao's *My Neighbour Totoro* put their fledgling Studio Ghibli on the map. This time Takahata had had a five-year head start, but still missed their summer 2013 date, and was head-down at work in Ghibli's custom-established Studio 7 when the TV showed Miyazaki broadcasting his retirement. "Announcing it to the press is what's weird," Takahata mutters in a useful documentary tracking *Kaguya's* tortuous making. Miyazaki had invited him to share the stage, but he'd declined.

"By nature he is a real slugabed sloth... the descendant of some giant sloth that once crawled the plains of earth in the Pliocene era," says Miyazaki of his friend, colleague and inspiration Paku-san in *Starting Point*, the first volume of Miyazaki's collected writings and interviews. (Why 'Paku-san'? "The story is that every day he would arrive just barely on time, drinking tap water and wolfing down bread. He sounded like this: *paku, paku.*") "With Paku-san," he adds, "you can be guaranteed that at several points in the production he will begin yelling, 'I can't possibly make this film!'"

Takahata himself, in the epilogue to *Starting Point*, writes: "Miya-san has always aggressively tried to assume responsibility for various things, but at some unknown point I – the giant sloth – began to sneakily avoid responsibility. And since Miya-san is responsible for Studio Ghibli, whenever I do any work I have tended to create a great deal of trouble for him by, among other things, causing delays in production schedules." And not only for Miyazaki. Suzuki Toshio, Ghibli's third founding musketeer, declined to produce the film because he couldn't give Takahata the requisite 24/7 attention – during this period he produced *Tales from*





THE OLD AND THE NEW
The style chosen by Takahata Isao (below, right) for *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (above) represents a radical departure for studio-produced feature animation and harks back to Japanese wood-block and scroll art



Earthsea (2006), *Ponyo* (2008), *Arrietty* (2010), *From up on Poppy Hill* (2011) and *The Wind Rises* (2013).

Instead it fell on young first-time producer Nishimura Yoshiaki – not unfairly, as he'd spent 18 months back in 2005-06 trying to motivate a reluctant Takahata to undertake the project. "It's that simple: I really want to see Isao Takahata's last movie," he says in the making-of doc. Five years later, they had 30 minutes of storyboard.

The irony is that *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* itself is a lamentation for time's hasty passage – animated in a fleet brushstroke style that exudes spontaneity and swiftness. It's a radical look – at least for studio-produced feature animation – that harks back to Japanese wood-block and scroll art, here used to animate Takahata's version of Japan's oldest-recorded folk tale, which dates back at least a millennium. More commonly titled *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, it concerns the eponymous farmer's discovery inside a luminous bamboo shoot of a tiny girl whom he and his wife raise as their daughter, with financial assistance provided by nuggets of gold he finds in further shoots of bamboo; taking these as a sign, they name her Princess Kaguya, meaning 'shining light'. Spurred, as she grows up, by her great and refined beauty, a series of increasingly noble admirers come with fanciful tributes to solicit her as their bride, but she sends them all away on impossible errands, only to find herself rueing her own foreshortened time on earth.

Takahata has equivocated about whether to call this his last film. ("If I still have the physical stamina, will, and mental powers left in me, and there are people who will invest in it, a producer who will manage it all, and if I am blessed with the kind of collaborators I had on this project, I would like to make another film," he told Bill Desowitz for *Indiewire*. "But this would require a miracle, so when I consider whether it is possible or impossible, I think it is more likely to be impossible.") Still, as with *The Wind Rises* there's certainly a valedictory air to it, a nostalgic genius for reincarnating the moments that, in Miyazaki's words, make "this life worth living". The film's first act exalts in a pastoralism, and the alignment

of nature and high-spirited youth, the raw ingredients of so many Ghibli movies, as Kaguya grows up hymning "birds, bugs, beasts, grass, trees, flowers", relishing the taste of melons and forest fruits, the company of animals and her peasant friends, who snub her father's airs and nickname her 'Lil Bamboo'.

This is what Miyazaki calls Takahata's everyday-life animation, a move away from the fantasy and fabular heroism of most animation – including Takahata's 1968 feature debut *The Little Norse Prince* (aka *Horus, Prince of the Sun*), on which Miyazaki worked, and indeed most of Miyazaki's subsequent movies – towards a realism of setting and narrative, begun with the 1974 TV series *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* on which the pair collaborated. The observational precision and exuberance with which Kaguya's first baby rolls and steps are animated fully bear out Takahata's claims for his experimental style, and for building his production around key singular talents. Oga Kazuo's backgrounds are synonymous with Studio Ghibli productions, but he'd not art-directed for the studio since Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* in 1997; here, extending the idea of incomplete, piecemeal backgrounds begun in Takahata's last feature, the newspaper comic strip-adapted *My Neighbours the Yamadas* (1999), he composes in limpid watercolours and diaphanous backgrounds that fade off into a kind of cartoon negative space, emphasising (in this case) the realism of the foreground actions, and their occasional outbursts of expressionism. The younger Tanabe Osamu, who has worked on all of Takahata's Ghibli animation, provides the character designs, his rough line-drawings traced over with rare lightness by the animators without any clean-up stage. "I've believed this for 50 years: when you're drawing fast there's passion," Takahata explains. "With a carefully finished product that passion gets lost." Kaguya's delay also meant Takahata was able to score the services of Miyazaki's perennial composer Joe Hisaishi, first brought into the fold by Takahata as producer on Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), the film whose success launched Studio Ghibli.

The twist in this first act is that Kaguya grows up inhumanly fast – though her blink-and-she’s-sprouted-again transformations may strike a familiar note for any watching parents. The movie telescopes time like *Only Yesterday* (1991), Takahata’s adaptation of Okamoto Hotaru and Tone Yuko’s nostalgic manga, whose memories of a girl’s childhood in 1966 Tokyo are refracted in the movie through the belated soul-searching of her rather Rohmeresque, unassertive 27-year-old self on a farming holiday in the countryside. Which is to say that *Princess Kaguya* soon leaves behind the bucolic comradeship of *Panda! Go Panda!* (1972), *Goshu, the Cellist* (1982) and *Pom Poko* (1994), Takahata’s fables of nature seeking accommodation with man, for another Ghibli commonplace: the follies of human greed and aggrandisement. The newly enriched, socially aspirational cutter removes his family from the fields to a dedicated palace where he lavishes his princess with robes, and lessons in the arts and graces of Japanese medieval ladyhood at the hands of the humourless Lady Sagami. (“A lady does not sweat,” Sagami pronounces, struggling to impose the plucking custom of *hikimayu* on Kaguya’s eyebrows, as well as the black-dyeing of her teeth through the practice of *ohaguro*.)

But it’s Kaguya’s free spirit that’s most in contention here: the bamboo cutter wants none of her old “hillbilly” friends at her coming-of-age party, designed to show her off to “name guests”. And while the style with which she dispatches her five noble suitors to find the impossible objects to which they have compared her will tickle feminist sensibilities, faintly echoing the spunkiness we love in Miyazaki’s heroines, it remains the circumscribed manoeuvre of a girl with only the power of refusal. Never has a Ghibli film strayed so far into the social pessimism of a Mizoguchi Kenji tragedy.

Entertainingly rendered as these episodes dutifully lifted from the original tale are, their minor variations barely develop Kaguya’s story. On the other hand, Kaguya’s obduracy does illuminate a certain anarchic, anti-institutional streak in Takahata’s work. The tragedy in *Grave of the Fireflies*, about a brother and sister orphaned by the firebombing of Tokyo in the last months of World War II, is not just that war severs social ties, but that no one is prepared to build the bridges that would save the two children’s lives – and that Seita, the brother, falls for the short-lived glee of playing outlaw.

In Studio Ghibli, Takahata helped build perhaps the world’s greatest foundation for the art of cel animation – only to tire of the technique and cast about for something different. “The hard and fast rules of Ghibli are no use to him,” comments Suzuki at the start of *Kaguya*’s making-of doc, explaining how the recondite production requirements of the whimsical, cartoon-haiku style of *My Neighbours the Yamadas* nearly ruined the studio’s system, as well as forsaking its visual brand. “You’re going to break things again, aren’t you?” another confidante asks Takahata as he lumbers closer to starting a movie that would insist on massive amounts of trial and error while making corrections that much harder (watercolours, for instance, are less amenable to retouching than traditional acrylics). Late in the production someone proposes that a tight new schedule will preclude any further “fiddling”. “We can always fiddle,” replies Takahata.

Nor was this news to anyone; years after the financial failure of his debut, Takahata’s name was cursed by its

Takahata proved that animation has the power to depict the mind of humans in depth, but he also showed how scary it was for a corporation to make him the director of a feature-length film

producers. With *The Little Norse Prince*, wrote Miyazaki in *Starting Point*, “Paku-san really proved that animation has the power to depict the inner mind of humans in depth. However, he also showed how risky and scary it was for a corporation to make him the director of a feature-length film. A production that was supposed to take one year was delayed once, then delayed again – by the time it was finally completed I had gotten married, had my first son, and my son had already celebrated his first birthday.” (Happily, *Kaguya* was underwritten by Nippon Television Network at the behest of its late chair Ujiei Seiichiro, a Takahata fan, to the tune of some five billion yen, or \$40 million.) If Takahata is a sloth, he’s one who has sympathies with the happy-go-lucky, shapeshifting *tanuki* (raccoon dogs) of his wonderful conservationist fantasy *Pom Poko*, the film you’d get if you crossed *The Wombles* with *Watership Down*, and a story about metamorphosis that found him mixing multiple styles of animation.

For her part, when she’s not sending away her suitors Kaguya knuckles down to the rules of the game in her gilded cage; her girlish defiance of Sagami’s ladyship drill subsides, she shows herself preternaturally capable of the appropriate comportment, her koto playing is clearly sublime and she hides her emotional hand. As in *The Wind Rises*, Miyazaki’s greatest breach with the hero’s-journey standard, *Kaguya* becomes a portrait of a protagonist caught in time’s tide, curtailed in her desires, defeatist in her inability to approach happiness. Also like Jiro in *The Wind Rises*, Kaguya elopes in her dreams. Once, pent up during her coming-of-age ceremony, she tears out of her tent on her way back to her old village, the backgrounds falling away in her rush, Tanabe’s pencil strokes cutting to the quick, only to find the fields in winter, used and fallow, her friends departed. Another time – and here we have reached the film’s final act – she flies in a rhapsodic extramarital embrace over the land and sea with Sutemaru, the peasant farmer-boy of her heart. Such flights of fancy are a minor Takahata motif: girls find their bodies soaring with their spirits in 1979’s *Anne of Green Gables* (another of Takahata’s ‘World Masterpiece Theatre’ series of TV adaptations) and *Only Yesterday*, while in *Yamadas* marriage is imagined as a metaphysical bobsleigh ride which takes to the air, collecting one baby from a floating peach and another from a bamboo cane.

It’s a testament to Takahata and his team’s painstaking artistry that all this time we’ve been layering human psychology on an enigma plucked from the long grass. This will come as a spoiler only for those, like me, previously unfamiliar with the sci-fi element of *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, but it transpires that Kaguya was not of this earth and soon must take her leave; her tribe come for her in the night like Buddhist bounty hunters or the spellbound feline press gang of Ghibli’s *The Cat Returns* (2002), eerily beatific envoys from lands without conflict, passion – or, in this case, memory, with Kaguya another in the movies’ line of alien emissaries come to sample human drama. Helped by Nikaido Kazumi’s plaintive closing song, she leaves clinging to nostalgia and hope. “People will still be wondering exactly what’s going on,” predicts Takahata – but that’s life too. 



The Tale of the Princess Kaguya is released in UK cinemas on 20 March and is reviewed on page 90

NOTHING IS VALID

It wasn't just the communist authorities in the aftermath of the Prague Spring who found the pugnacious, mercurial films of the late Czech director Vera Chytilová challenging – her uncompromising work was intent on pushing the very boundaries of cinema itself

By Michael Brooke

The late Gilbert Adair wrote that he could offer no higher praise than calling someone “an exception”, and such was Vera Chytilová. A female filmmaker at a time when the number of prominent ones worldwide barely scraped double figures, she produced radically avant-garde work within the mainstream Czech film industry and, while she suffered a period of officially enforced silence common to many of her more creatively outspoken compatriots after the Soviet invasion of August 1968, she bounced back in a way that many of them failed to do, directing numerous features (many of them big domestic hits) and documentaries between her 1976 comeback and her death on 12 March 2014.

She once said, “I proceed from the assumption that nothing is valid,” and this thread ran throughout her career. So too did her addiction to freewheeling improvisation, occasional technical slip-ups being far more forgivable than boring the viewer. In person, she was exactly like her films: mercurial, energetic and instinctively pugnacious. Her reputation outside her native country mostly revolves around her second feature, *Daisies* (1966), although the balance is being partly redressed by a BFI Southbank retrospective in March and three forthcoming Chytilová DVDs from Second Run: in release order, *Traps* (1997), *The Fruit of Paradise* (1969) and *Something Different* (1963), the last two supported by her early mini-features *Ceiling* (1961) and *A Bagful of Fleas* (1962).

Born in Ostrava in the former Sudetenland on 2 February 1929 (her parents were forced to leave less than a decade later after Hitler's annexation), Chytilová quit her philosophy and architecture studies and was talent-spotted as a fashion model, which led to a tiny part in Martin Fric's comedy *The Emperor's Baker* (1951). She had always been a film fan (in a typically candid interview for the *Golden Sixties* TV series, she once said, “I would pee on the chair so as not to miss a single frame”), but the moment she stepped on to an actual film set, she knew what she wanted to do with the rest of her life, and used her contacts to secure a job as a clapper loader at Prague's Barrandov Studios, hoping to use this as a springboard towards formal studies at FAMU, the country's main film school. She was the only female applicant for the directing course, and when asked why she wanted to make films, she bluntly said that nobody else was doing it properly.

Her graduation film, the medium-length *Ceiling*, was

completed thanks to the kind of subterfuge that all creatively ambitious filmmakers need to master. After her script was rejected for showing too much interest in a “bourgeois woman” (the film's protagonist, whose modelling aspirations were drawn from her creator's own disillusioning experience), Chytilová asked the resident student scriptwriting star Pavel Juráček to rewrite it. He did so and it was passed for production, whereupon Chytilová promptly began shooting her original script, trusting – correctly, as it turned out – that the film's visual and conceptual verve (cutting blithely between dramatised sequences and off-the-cuff *cinéma vérité*) would banish objections. A further mini-feature sported the splendidly Chytilován title *A Bagful of Fleas*, in which she portrayed the lives of young female millworkers, drawing heavily on their own experiences and colourful language, and encouraging them to play out their own lives in front of the camera.

Her contrasting approach to both these earlier films fed into her debut feature proper, *Something Different*, which combined *Fleas'* quasi-documentary approach (a portrait of Olympic gymnast Eva Bosáková) with *Ceiling's* pre-scripted fiction (this time about a harassed and neglected housewife). Both women are shown having difficult relationships with men – Eva's trainer, Vera the housewife's husband – and although they never meet and ostensibly lead very different lives, Chytilová reveals that they have more in common than one might suppose, in particular a day-to-day existence largely dominated by gruelling and thankless repetition. Chytilová is constantly alert to how the women move, whether via Bosáková's flamboyant routines or the way Vera holds her make-up mirror.

She returned to short filmmaking for the collaborative *Pearls of the Deep* (1965), in which she and six FAMU contemporaries (Juraj Herz, Jaromil Jires, Jiri Menzel, Jan Nemec, Ivan Passer and Evald Schorm) each adapted a short story by Bohumil Hrabal, who had yet to achieve widespread fame. In *The World Cafeteria*, Chytilová delivered a sardonic anatomy of a wedding reception (and the social expectations that marriage engenders) which falls apart when a dead body is discovered on the premises.

Conceived with her second husband, cinematographer Jaroslav Kucera, and their mutual friend, writer/designer Ester Krumbachová (herself one of the great creative innovators of 60s Czech cinema), Chytilová's



YOUTH IN REVOLT
Chytilová's second feature, *Daisies* (1966, above), followed the surreal exploits of a pair of teenage girls, while *The Very Late Afternoon of a Faun* (1983, right) examined the life of a lecherous middle-aged man



second feature *Daisies* consciously and exhilaratingly sought to push the limits of film form. This is take-no-prisoners filmmaking from the opening sequence in which the two protagonists (both named Marie) each assert their individuality while the movement of their limbs suggests that they're being manipulated by off-screen puppeteers. Later in the film, they run riot not merely through assorted physical locations but even through the filmic image itself, at one point cutting it into fragments with scissors. Its reception was expectedly polarised, but it was impossible to ignore: at a time when Czech cinema was primarily associated with the bittersweet comedies of Menzel and Milos Forman, here was an artist openly refusing to kowtow to any notion of artistic or political correctness, the Godard to their Truffaut and Rohmer. (Talking of the French )

 New Wave, Jacques Rivette was an early Chytilová champion.)

The Fruit of Paradise began with swooning near-abstracts, its silhouetted and solarised Adam-and-Eve figures walking against a constantly dissolving backdrop of flowers and one of Zdenek Liska's most ravishing scores, before giving way to an allegorical portrait of the original Fall of Man as filtered through an overtly female gaze. It's Chytilová's most deceptively beautiful film by some distance, but the edible-looking colours are laced with venom. Completed after the Soviet invasion, it proved too formalist (and openly erotic) for the authorities, and she was banned from filmmaking for several years. The enforced creative silence was only broken after a personal letter to President Gustáv Husák in which she passionately asserted her belief in socialism, defended her earlier work against its various official criticisms, and stressed the importance of strong female voices within Czechoslovak culture. Although such tactics could often backfire (a similar letter did Václav Havel few favours), it seems to have worked, as *The Apple Game* (1976) was greenlit shortly afterwards.

CENSORS AND SENSIBILITIES

From this point on, her films were no longer so formally extreme, although much spiky individuality remained, often accompanied by broad and sometimes crude farce. If the title of her comeback echoed *The Fruit of Paradise*, the film itself was easily her most conventional to date. A colourful comedy about a rural nurse seduced and abandoned by a sophisticated doctor (played by Jiri Menzel), it returned to the territory of *Something Different* in the way it set up stereotypical sex-war situations only to undermine them with feminist flourishes. The more openly confrontational *Panelstory* (1979) similarly harked back to her early semi-documentary work, this time from the perspective of the inhabitants of an already occupied but still unfinished block of flats. Not unreasonably, it was interpreted as an embittered allegory about Czechoslovak socialism (it was banned shortly after its initial release), but Chytilová contested this, saying that she was more interested in exploring humanity's wider moral failings – typically, the inhabitants of the flats prove more pleasant company than the authorities who are selling them short. Official suspicion was also cast upon *Calamity* (1981), about a university dropout (Bolek Polívka, thereafter a regular collaborator) retraining as a train driver but finding no more fulfilment in life – this may be a joshing reference to Menzel's *Closely Observed Trains* (1966).

She reunited with Krumbachová (as co-writer) for the last time for the comedy *The Very Late Afternoon of a Faun* (1983), in which a middle-aged *roué* is forced to confront the inexorable ticking of his body-clock and the very different desires of the increasingly younger women to whom he remains insatiably attracted. But the man is not presented as the figure of fun that one might expect (indeed, Leos Sucharipa's performance, for all his character's many glaring faults, provides the film's emotional anchor), and neither are the women treated especially sympathetically. Her next two films were developed from theatre projects: *The Jester and the Queen* (1987) adapted Polívka's Pirandellian allegory, which examined foreign (German) occupation across multiple time frames, deliberately blurring the distinction between nightmare and



'Traps' begins with a scene of graphic mass castration, and male viewers are unlikely to be comforted by the fact that the castratees are all pigs

equally grim reality. *Tainted Horseplay* (1989), made with the experimental theatre group Sklep, was one of the first features to examine the legacy of HIV infection as a by-product of casual sex as a means of alleviating boredom.

Chytilová had refused to emigrate to the West because of a longstanding distrust of its dominant culture, so it came as no surprise that her post-Velvet Revolution films took advantage of the sudden abolition of censorship to cast a caustic eye over the downsides of the country's ultra-rapid social and economic reconstruction. *The Inheritance or Fuckoffguysgoodday* (1992) was a huge popular hit, although only domestically: as with many comedies, much of its verbal culture-clash humour and even the second part of its title defies accurate translation. It's about a feckless good-for-nothing (Polívka) who unexpectedly inherits a large amount of cash and property, transforming him into a vulgar capitalist who delights in flaunting his unearned wealth at every opportunity. Subtle it wasn't, but it struck a powerful chord with an audience who increasingly shared Chytilová's suspicions about the way that their country was going following an all too brief period of national euphoria.

Also marketed as a populist comedy (although with fewer fans), *Traps* begins with a scene of graphic mass castration, and male viewers are unlikely to be comforted by the fact that the castratees are all pigs, although this does at least set an appropriately uncompromising tone from the start. While a bald narrative summary makes it sound like a Czech remake of Abel Ferrara's *Ms.45* (1980) – a woman, Lenka, is raped twice over, and exacts a permanently disabling revenge – it's also a pointed political and social satire. The rapists are a government minister and an advertising executive, a convenient hook on which to examine a raft of social ills, and one of the film's despairing conclusions is that even a literally emasculated man will be more successful in present-day Czech society than any woman. Chytilová's last two cinema features, *Expulsion from Paradise* (2001) and *Pleasant Moments* (2006), reunited her with Polívka, who stars in the first as a creatively frustrated filmmaker trying to shoot a serious philosophical project on a nudist beach (Chytilová and her cameraman were briefly arrested during production when their motives came under suspicion), and in the second as a man trying to wear down the resistance of his married would-be paramour, an overworked psychiatrist.

In parallel with these fiction features, Chytilová continued to explore her longstanding interest in documentary proper, making a number of nonfiction programmes for Czech TV. Most of them are sadly off limits to non-Czech speakers, but the BFI retrospective includes *Flights and Falls* (2000), a portrait of three veteran photographers that doubles as a study of Czech culture during the politically repressed 1950s (a period Chytilová recalled well, having lived through it while married to one of her subjects, Karel Ludwig), and there's a generously annotated English-subtitled DVD of *Searching for Ester* (2005), an affectionate, highly personal portrait of Krumbachová, who had died in 1996. Chytilová was herself the subject of Jasmina Blazevic's documentary *The Journey* (2004), which revealed her to be as delightfully contrary in her seventies as she'd appeared 40 years earlier. 



The retrospective 'Defiance and compassion: the films of Vera Chytilová' is running at the BFI Southbank, London, until 17 March

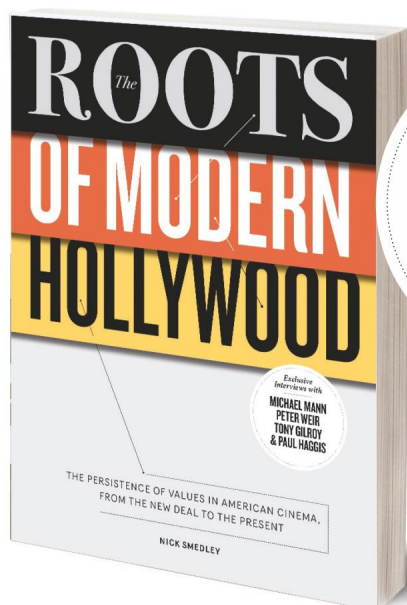
PERSONA NON GRATA
Chytilová was banned from filmmaking by the Czech authorities for several years following *The Fruit of Paradise* (1969), an enforced creative silence broken only following a personal letter to President Gustáv Husák



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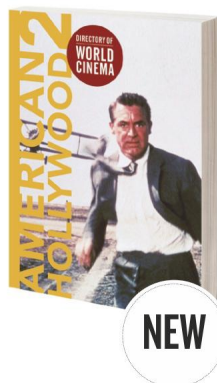
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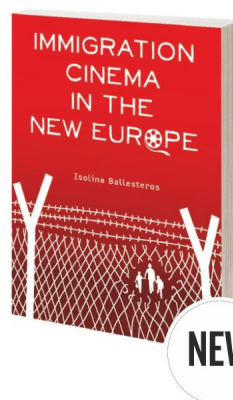
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THE GREAT GAME

The extraordinary footage assembled in 'Bitter Lake', Adam Curtis's powerful film about the tangled history of Afghanistan, offers some welcome insights – but in his bid to counteract the lazy fables of good and evil beloved of some politicians, is the director in danger of oversimplification too?

By Jason Burke

At around an hour and five minutes into Adam Curtis's long and very beautiful film *Bitter Lake* there is a sequence showing the aftermath of an ambush on a convoy of Soviet, or Soviet-supplied tanks, in Afghanistan sometime in the 1980s. The film is full of such images, long forgotten, dredged out of some hidden vault by dedicated archival research. They are extraordinary, and watching pictures of King Zahir Shah and Queen Elizabeth on the Mall in the early 1970s, or King Abdulaziz, the founder of Saudi Arabia, and President Roosevelt at their fateful meeting on a US warship in Great Bitter Lake in the middle of the Suez Canal in 1945, is in itself a powerful experience for anyone who knows a little of the history of the Middle East, south-west Asia, the Islamic world and the conflicts of today as much as yesterday. Many of these people and events have been too hastily consigned to the history books and one risk of this, Curtis is right to argue, is that we make the same mistakes, for the same reasons, guided by the same misperceptions that – and here the filmmaker is more controversial – serve more or less the same vested and hidden interests.

The image that struck me 65 minutes in was that of a dead man, a boy really, lying in a pool of his own blood on the pitted surface of an Afghan road. He is on his side, in what first-aiders call the recovery position. He is still in his teens, and has been killed in a mujahideen attack. What is significant is that he is almost certainly Afghan, a conscript in the government army that fought alongside the Soviets throughout the war and then continued to fight the mujahideen after the occupiers had pulled out. That a very significant number of the victims of the Afghan fighters bankrolled by the US, Saudi Arabia and others in the 1980s were other Afghans has conveniently been forgotten. But such details are important, as international forces found later when they arrived in Afghanistan determined, like the Soviets, to 'modernise' the country. One evening in 2006 I watched a British Army patrol walk through fields on the outskirts of Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province in southern Afghanistan. An old man watched too, counting off the number of different military forces he had seen come through his village in his life. He stopped at seven, and then chuckled that he had probably forgotten a few. He included Afghan government soldiers among them.

It was decades-old allegiances, feuds and memories that often divided communities into pro-government or pro-Taliban, as well as more immediate considerations. British officers always used to say two things after their tours in Afghanistan. The first was, "It's a very complicated country," as if any were simple. And the second was, "But wonderful people".

The film has already usefully explained that at some stage in the 1980s or 1990s conflicts that were once seen as political, and with causes in the real world, in dirty nasty politics and people, and in the deep complexities of societies, became problems for the West to solve. It has mentioned how the Saudi Arabian monarchy had used its massive oil wealth, vastly inflated following the 1973-74 embargo, to fund the export of rigorous, intolerant and conservative 'Wahhabi' strands of Islam around the Muslim world – a move it made both to bolster internal support after a bid by domestic extremists to prompt an Islamist revolution by seizing the Grand Mosque at Mecca, and to spread its influence throughout the Islamic world following the Iranian revolution. Curtis has also weaved in various strands of the US and UK reliance on Saudi Arabia, a supplier of oil for the former, and a key customer of arms for the latter.

By the 90-minute mark we are in the late 1990s, with Osama bin Laden, the head of al-Qaida, in Afghanistan and planning a new global strategy of terrorism that will target the US, the 'far enemy'.

Bin Laden's anti-US sentiment, though undoubtedly increased by the US support for the Saudi monarchy following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait 1990, did not originate then as Curtis suggested. And it is odd too to claim that bin Laden's ideas became "mixed" with Wahhabism during the 1990s when the leader of al-Qaida was born and raised in a strict Wahhabi environment in Jeddah and known as devout from an early age. But Curtis does accurately explain bin Laden's fundamental project of using spectacular violence to unleash a transformation of the Islamic world through mass mobilisation. The 9/11 attacks sought to terrorise the West, mobilise existing Islamic militants and, above all, polarise sentiment around the world.

"At the end of the 20th century, faced with a chaotic and complex world, politicians retreated into simple sto-

CASUALTIES OF WAR
Some images in *Bitter Lake*, like the Afghan youth killed by the mujahideen in the 1980s (below), provide important context about the country, such as the fact that a significant number of the victims of the Afghan fighters bankrolled by the US and Saudi Arabia in the 1980s were other Afghans

The image that struck me 65 minutes in was that of a dead man, a boy really, lying in a pool of his own blood on the pitted surface of an Afghan road





ries of right and wrong, moral fables of good and evil... and ruthlessly simplified the complex struggles around the world into simple stories of good versus evil," the narrator tells us, as the film moves into its final 40 minutes covering the international engagement with Afghanistan from 2001 to now. This is tightly and intelligently described, particularly the emphasis on how the fundamental failing of the international forces was to become just another militia protecting a corrupt, predatory and inefficient government and thus how, instead of containing the war, they made it worse. Many may argue with some of the more simplistic statements in this section, but the whole shoddy story of the Western project in the country – badly thought out, wrongheaded and hugely politicised – is brought home. "The way we decided whether you were Taliban or not was whether you were firing at us," says one former officer, explaining how the British blundered into a complex civil war that had been going on for decades.

Some of the arguments in the film perhaps make too many links. One strand Curtis seeks to analyse involves Western banks, which are no doubt important but make an already complicated story cumbersome.

Did the oil price rise in the 1970s lead to rightwing governments coming to power, which then led to a squeeze on inflation, which led to the destruction of the manufacturing sector in the West, which led to the dominance of service industries paying lower wages, which led to politicians effectively buying social peace by unleashing a credit boom to convince people they had more income when, in fact, they had less? And did that then shift further political power from elected reps to financial institutions, which led us to the financial crisis? It is a very long chain of causation and possibly

as oversimplified as some of the stories Curtis seeks to criticise.

But the final point Curtis makes is a good one. From the founders of Saudi Arabia's pact with the Wahhabi revivalists of the early part of the last century, through the petrodollar-fuelled export of this most reactionary of doctrines in the 1970s, on to the madrasas of Pakistan that were so key in the formation of the Taliban, through the violence of bin Laden and on to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria today, there is a direct connection and one that explains more of the world we live in than many imagine, and than many officials or politicians want to admit.

On his blog, Curtis says that while journalism used to tell a grand, unfurling narrative, it now just relays disjointed and often wildly contradictory fragments of information. This is partly true. As a reporter myself, largely overseas in the regions *Bitter Lake* describes so vividly and in many of the conflicts too, I have experienced the dramatic acceleration and fragmentation of the production, dissemination and consumption of news. But I am far from certain that any news reporting has ever really described the broad sweep of history. In fact, deeper, reflective writing, informed by deep historical understanding of regions, is probably easier to find now than ever – not just on specialist niches but on major international websites dedicated to analysis, context and reporting. Some, of course, merely reinforce prejudices. But many do not, even if two-hour-plus beautifully crafted films are rare. Curtis has made a powerful statement about many and varied important issues. The most haunting image for me remains that of the dead Afghan teenager, on a potholed road in the mountains, some time in the 1980s. **S**



***Bitter Lake* is available to watch now in the UK on BBC iPlayer**

A PAWN IN THEIR GAME
Adam Curtis's mosaic-like portrait of Afghan history in *Bitter Lake* (above) weaves a tale of imperial rivalry, invasion, war, corruption, betrayal and duplicity

AGNÈS VARDÀ

The veteran French director, who has recently been honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award from the European Film Academy, began her career as a stills photographer before becoming one of the driving spirits of the *nouvelle vague*, marrying a deep humanism with a playful self-awareness to create a series of poetic, political works that have repeatedly championed the lives of the marginalised and dispossessed. **Interview by Chris Darke**

Now in her eighties, Agnès Varda is a unique figure in world cinema, a much-loved personality, happy to play along with her psychedelic 'little old lady' persona, whether donning a potato-costume at an art fair or a leopard-print all-in-one as she did when receiving an award for lifetime achievement at the 2014 Locarno Film Festival. And while this captures something of her freewheeling and playful character, she also represents a living link to the remarkable period of creative ferment in post-war France that also produced filmmakers like her late friends and collaborators Alain Resnais and Chris Marker and her filmmaker husband Jacques Demy, who died in 1990.

Over a lunch of skate and puréed spinach, with occasional interruptions from Varda's cats, we discussed her work and her 'three lives'.

Chris Darke: In the *Tout(e) Varda* box-set, there's a short documentary that shows you taking a street portrait of the photographer Brassai.

Agnès Varda: The production team went to INA [the French national audiovisual archive] to look at everything they hold about me and they found this little film. I've no idea who made it and I don't remember being filmed. It was shot just round the corner.

CD: So you were already living in rue Daguerre?

AV: Yes, I moved here in 1951. I'd finished shooting *La Pointe Courte* in 1954 but I hadn't finished the editing, so perhaps someone had heard I'd made a film and decided to make a film themselves. But it's certainly me with one of those old cameras that you had to cover with a veil. There's a comical effect because the footage is slightly speeded up, but mostly because I'm carrying around my little wooden footstool, which I still have here, and I have a little cloth I put on it so as not to dirty it.

What astonished me in the film is that we see a dog pissing and kids going to school, and it's all very dated by the style of the people going by. Effectively, though, it shows me at work. I made a film in 1982 called *Ulysse*, which is based on another photograph I took in 1954, one I'd made with the same bellows camera, and I started *Ulysse* with the words, "I used to see the image upside down." There's an image of a goat on the ground, like a fallen constellation, and that was the origin of the photograph. With those cameras, you'd frame the image upside down, so I saw Brassai through the camera with his head at the bottom of the image. He came, he posed, said "Thank you" and left.

ON AGNÈS VARDÀ

'I always say Agnès Varda was to the French New Wave as Eve is to the Ruff Ryders: a ride-or-die bitch, respected by a pack of tough gentlemen. I was so impressed by how Varda manages to be both deeply emotional and utterly in control of the technical elements of filmmaking. That had seemed to me to be an impossible line to straddle, and she does it so beautifully.'

Lena Dunham, writer-director, *criterion.com*

'Varda is endlessly interesting and her genuine love for the people she films rubs off on us.'

Marc Isaacs, filmmaker, 2014 *Sight & Sound* documentary poll

CD: Two elements in this photograph are interesting because we see them elsewhere in your photography and films alike. There's portraiture and the slightly abstract aspect of the ruined wall.

AV: In the 1950s and 60s there was the discovery of the beauty of slightly ruined things. Artists like Raymond Hains and Jacques Villeglé filmed walls covered with torn posters. Brassai had done a whole book of photographs of walls and graffiti, so the wall in my photograph relates to him and his work. When I was in Cadaqués at Salvador Dalí's place, he gave me ten minutes to take a shot and I found this perspective that gives on to a void, which I was also very happy with.

CD: So the way you placed your subjects was open to the decisive moment?

AV: When I saw a poster of Sophia Loren in a street in Portugal, for example, I just stood there waiting so I could photograph this woman when she was exactly beneath it. You might say she's even more beautiful than Sophia. The photo of Brassai could have been taken at any time in his life, but he was the only photographer I sought advice from. I was very young, so I took what I'd done with me, which was worse than useless, and he was very kind. He told me, "I think it's worth you knowing that there are photographers who've done things before you, and a bit better. Since you haven't studied photography, you can school yourself. Perhaps you can look at Weston and Atget."

I lost a lot of time teaching myself. But I started earning a living from photography straightaway, taking trivial photographs of families and weddings to make money. But I immediately wanted to make what I called 'compositions', like the photograph in



 *Ulysse*. And it was with these that I had the impression I was doing something where I was asking questions with composition, form and meaning. Thanks to a stroke of luck, I knew one of the girls who married [actor and theatre director] Jean Vilar. When Vilar started his theatre festival in Avignon in 1947, he said to me, "Can you help me out and then perhaps take some photos?" The first photographs I took weren't good, but after five years or so I'd made some progress and in 1951 Gérard Philipe, who was a film star, rejoined the Avignon Festival. As part of the promotion for the festival I took a lot of photographs of Vilar himself, of shows, and of Gérard Philipe and María Casares. And it was thanks to Philipe's profile that my photographs became well known.

CD: Another aspect of your photography is your travels, especially to China in 1957.

AV: I was invited through the Franco-Chinese Friendship Association, and because Chris Marker had gone there the year before. China wasn't recognised by the UN at the time. I took an enormous number of photos, but they ended up only being used for small things by Editions du Seuil. Cartier-Bresson went to China at about the same time and we ended up taking almost the same shots, so obviously they chose Cartier-Bresson. I've never had an agency or a gallery behind me so I've only shown things more or less by chance. Occasionally I got sent to Rome to take photographs of Visconti. I shot Fellini in Paris in 1955 for *La strada*. Sometimes I had one or two commissions for magazines, but I never did a book of my own photographs.

CD: You were in Cuba between 1962 and 1963 to shoot *Salut les Cubains*, a film made up entirely of photographs. This is the same moment that Marker is making *La Jetée* [1962].

AV: In 1961 I shot *Cléo from 5 to 7*, which came out in '62. Marker went to Cuba in '61 and he shot *iCuba Sí!*. It was the same as for China: he told the Cubans, "You should invite Agnès Varda, she takes good photos." But because I knew he'd shot in difficult conditions, I said to myself, "I can't go with equipment, I can't find a crew, so I'll take photographs and then film them." So I went there with that project in mind and when I took various shots of the same thing, it was to recompose them. I had a Leica with me, the same model as Cartier-Bresson, and I had to wind it on twice between each shot. So if someone walked towards me I couldn't just go 'click, click, click', I had to go 'click – wind, wind – click'. So there's a time lapse between each shot. My style of editing took account of this sort of accelerated movement and so it's very jerky. The technique was to work from the soundtrack and edit three images, four images, six images. I'd always foreseen it as a way of making a film with photos.

CD: Your interest in portraiture is also present in *Daguerréotypes* [1975], *Mur murs* [1980]...

AV: The project with *Daguerréotypes* was to film my neighbours on the block, but to go no further than my electric cable would reach. Because what we call 'the silent majority' is immobile, it seemed to me that they could become their own photographs. There's the magician in the film who says, "I'm going to put you all to sleep." And ultimately what is a photograph? It's a movement that's asleep. So, all the couples at the end of the

film, they're really posing, as if everything that we've learned about them, where they come from, how they get on, their relationship to money, all of this was part of their relationships as couples.

CD: What distinctions do you make between your artistic activities of photography and cinema?

AV: What 'artistic activities'? I take photographs or I make films. Or I put films in the photos, or photos in the films. When I made my first film, *La Pointe Courte* – without experience, without having been an assistant before, without having gone to film school – I took photographs of everything I wanted to film, photographs that are almost models for the shots. And I started making films with the sole experience of photography, that's to say, where to place the camera, at what distance, with which lens and what lights?

CD: Does it have more to do with 'images' than 'shots'?

AV: No, there are plenty of shots. Perhaps it's as meticulous as a beautiful photo. Photography was a big influence in *La Pointe Courte*. There are shots that could have been photographs, but for me it's not a photographer's film because I'd discovered movement, dialogue, music – I was thinking of the music when I was writing the film – and above all the film's rhythm, alternating the couple with the life of the village, which provides a structure. That dictates the film more than beautiful photography. I was moving into a world with the elements of sound, words, music and, above all, movement – but also one of forms.

When I framed the faces in profile it was because I'd seen paintings by Braque and Picasso. Just as later on in *Lions Love (... and Lies)* [1969] I took a series of drawings that Picasso did in '35, '36, in which there's a guy on a column and a couple reclining with a young woman. There are three or four shots in *Lions Love* that are direct

I like the way a commentary can throw a different light on the images. Words add a pinch of spice to what's visible on screen

copies of Picasso's drawings. The way I see it is that artists have done this to help me, to protect and inspire me. *La Pointe Courte* is marked by what I'd learned from painters in my desire to explore form. To merge the faces of the couple – one facing forward, the other in front and in profile – was something I'd seen in painting and was a way of representing the idea of protecting the couple in a story where in fact they were coming apart. And then there were many images of landscape and territory. In *La Pointe Courte* there's a woman who maybe loves her guy but has never seen where he comes from. It's the first time she's come to *La Pointe Courte*, but he's lived there, his father too. He's on home territory and she's discovering it. It's something I found again when I made *Jacquot de Nantes* [1991], to reconstitute in fiction a little boy in his territory. It's extremely interesting when someone says to me, "You get people like the gleaners to talk," and my response is, "Yes, but on their home turf." If, like in *Vagabond* [*Sans toit ni loi*, 1985], I film a garage worker who's not an actor and he's in his office, he knows where the drawer is, where his pencil is, and when he goes into his workshop he knows where his tools are. So I can film him in his work clothes and get him to speak lines. *Vagabond* isn't a documentary, it's a fiction, but I used non-actors who were on their own territory.

CD: And your own 'territories' are also important.

AV: I've been here for 60 years. I feel strongly that rue Daguerre is my territory. [Whereas] Sète is where I spent my adolescence, where I made my first film, where I've kept strong ties, but most of my friends there are now dead. The town invited me as an artist. It was like coming full circle from my memories of childhood and adolescence. And in the Musée Paul Valéry I showed three video portraits on multiple panels [*Y'a pas que la mer*, 2011]: there's a fisherman with a mural behind him representing a boat and two panels with the boat where it moves. There's a portrait of a little girl with a white cow. The girl is looking at us, the cow is looking at us and on the panels it's the cows, in the same size as the portrait, first moving a little and then a lot.



Plumbing the depths: *Daguerréotypes* (1975)

My installations and exhibitions are part of my 'third life', which doesn't exist in my films but does exist because the exhibitions have been documented on film. What we find in this third life is a kind of meeting place of immobility – photography; and movement – cinema.

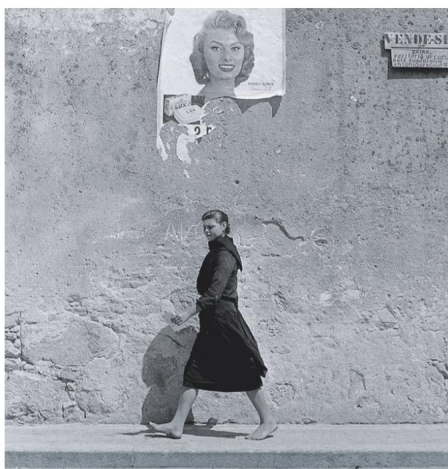
CD: Your training as an art historian, your practice...

AV: What 'practice'? It was just professors teaching us how to look. I've done documentaries, some with a straightforward relationship to a simple reality such as with my neighbours in *Daguerréotypes*. But still with this theme of people immobilised in photography. It's still a documentary, the people say where they come from and what they do. I'm at the service of the subject. I like the way a commentary can throw a different light on the images. There are some very beautiful documentaries without a word of commentary in them, like those by Frederick Wiseman, but Marker and I were among those who think words add a pinch of spice to what's visible on screen, and by using allegories sometimes they can bring out the poetic qualities of the images. When I made *Vagabond* I'd carried out a documentary enquiry but the film is entirely fictional; it's acted by real people but it's all written by me, including the words of the witnesses. And what interests me here? Cinematic structure: the 13 travelling shots. The journey of this girl towards her death, from right to left across the screen. In other words, it's not even a matter of suspense since we know from the outset that she's dead.

It's a figure of style, you know. In three-quarters of policiers there's a dead person and the question is: why is that person dead? In the *Columbo* series, which I adore, we see the crime and the investigation. But *Vagabond* isn't psychological. I wasn't looking to know, "What did her father do to her?" I was interested only in how she survives, the gestures she makes, how she eats and sleeps. So it's a behaviourist fiction. Cleanliness and dirt are very important themes in the film. Mona emerges from the sea at the start of the film clean and she becomes progressively dirty. I was picking up on the reality of girls who had taken to the road and their desire for freedom – these are elements of reality but highly transformed.

The problem that art always poses to us is: how have artists approached reality? Take the realist who can make us cry, as in the crucifixions by Van der Weyden that I show in [the 2012, five-part TV series] *Agnès Varda: From Here to There* – the women are in such a state of sadness. How can a painter represent that? What force of religion, or love, is needed? How can he represent a face like that, which is the face of suffering itself? So I have a lot of admiration for that sort of realism. But there are also abstract painters who can provoke an enormous amount of emotion: Nicolas de Staël, for example, whose paintings I find very beautiful. Or great installations – a guy like [Christian] Boltanski impresses me enormously. But in photography, cinema or text, the question is still: how does one transform reality? We de-realise it, or diminish it, if you like, to the benefit of reverie, or a dream life.

CD: I'd like to come back to documentaries and specifically the short films made in France



Varda's 1956 photo of Sophia Loren and the woman

after the war. You made *Du côté de la côte* and *O saisons, ô châteaux* [both 1958].

AV: That was because I'd made *La Pointe Courte* and everyone said, "Bravo!" but there was zero distribution. It showed for a couple of weeks in a small cinema and I remember Resnais said to me, "You have to re-enter the system. Lots of shorts are being commissioned, you should accept." So Pierre Braunberger proposed a film about the châteaux of the Loire – it was a commission. That was my first short. So I took my *Guide Bleu* and visited the châteaux. They were deserted except for the caretakers and the gardeners, so I filmed the caretakers, the gardeners and the trees so I could get an angle on the subject. It was a very historical, very chronological piece and the Ministry of Tourism was very happy with it and asked for another one about the Côte d'Azur.

CD: *Du côté de la côte* was released with *Hiroshima mon amour* [1959].

AV: Yes, that was extraordinary. At the time, shorts – even up to half an hour – were shown before the main feature and nobody talked through them.

CD: A lot of films about art were made by this school of filmmakers: Resnais's films about painters, Resnais and Marker's *Statues*



Naked talent: Varda's documentary *Ulysse* (1982) was based on a photograph she took in 1954

Also *Die* [1953], and others such as *La Petite Cuillère* [1960] by your 'technical advisor' on *La Pointe Courte*, Carlos Vilardebó...

AV: He was a guy who made short films. He was very nice, his young wife too. They helped find a crew and we set up a cooperative together. They believed in the project and wanted it to work out so we could pay everybody something. They were all generous and they were all poorly paid and housed on the film. If I hadn't made this first film with all this generosity – from Philippe Noiret too, and Silvia Monfort and the technicians. If Carlos Vilardebó hadn't said, "We'll find a cameraman who's prepared to work for free and a camera that's not too expensive..." When we made the first VHS of *La Pointe Courte* we had a party at the fisherman's neighbourhood of *La Pointe Courte* in Sète and he came along. I'll always be grateful to him.

After *O saisons, ô châteaux*, which was a commission, I was taking photographs of children and weddings to make a living and I wanted to make a film for myself, and that was *Diary of a Pregnant Woman* [*L'Opéra-Mouffe*, 1958], and I had the idea to ask Georges Delerue to do the music for it. It was one of his first pieces for film. I'd written some words and he set them to music... Basically it was me and a 16mm camera with three lenses, which Gérard Philipe's wife lent me. You couldn't shoot with it for longer than a minute, then you had to reload. I was pregnant and I'd go to the market twice a week. I wanted to film the people of this street and what interested me about this market was that it sold pretty disgusting things like tripe and offal. When you're pregnant you're often thinking about your guts like this and for me it was not so much a confusion as a kind of juxtaposition between a stomach that's eaten too much of that kind of rubbish, and one that's carrying a child. The second thing was to look at the old people in the street with the kind of tenderness that one would look at a baby. I wanted to look as if I was saying, "They too were once babies." So I projected on to these people who were in bad shape, drunk and all alone, the idea of childhood,



Du côté de la côte (1958)



The Beaches of Agnès (2008)



Ydessa, the Bears and etc. (2004)

← which is a complete contradiction really. I was already struck by people who had nowhere to live. I'd photographed them before I started making the film. What was terrible was that in between taking those photographs and shooting, three had died of the cold. It's a theme that's obsessed me throughout my life: the cold of *Vagabond*, *The Gleaners and I* [2000]...

CD: What was this house before you moved in?

AV: It was a frame shop. I bought it very cheap because it was in a terrible state. That's why we reconstructed it in its original state for *The Beaches of Agnès* [2008] because my children could never have imagined how disgusting it was.

CD: When I first saw *Ydessa, the Bears and etc.*, [2004] I was reminded of those postwar shorts about art because you, and perhaps Marker, had both continued to make films about art.

AV: But they're films about people. Louis Malle also continued making films like that. In each episode of *Agnès Varda: From Here to There* there's a documentary about an artist: there's Christian Boltanski, Pierrick Sorin, Miquel Barceló, Pierre Soulages, and there's also classical and ancient art. But these documentaries are contained within something else, whereas with *Ydessa* and *Les Dites Cariatides* [1984] they are primarily about art.

CD: What I especially like is your way of speaking very clearly and directly about art.

AV: That takes work, you know! For example, to film Boltanski's *Personnes* [2010], that beautiful installation, with all its levels of association – mosques and concentration camps, trains and scraps of clothing – I went back at least five times, because what it was crucial to convey was that the subject of depersonalisation was terrifying and that Boltanski had found the forms to express it, with steel boxes and numbers, a tower of clothes, the sounds of trains and heartbeats. I got him to talk about it and simplified the comprehension of this very complex work. I'm a go-between, a passer-on, not so much of information, but of intuition and sensations.

CD: I want to consider the word 'lightness' as an approach to something difficult and complex, such as in your short films about Boltanski and Soulages.

AV: I prefer the word 'fluidity'; it's more interesting than 'lightness', which tends to mean 'don't make things sad'. 'Fluidity', on the other hand, gives the impression of something that flows like water. It's that effortlessness I'm looking for.

Fluidity comes through editing and reflection. There's always a long editing process. *The Beaches of Agnès*, for instance, it's hard to narrate like that. That took nine months of editing. And it takes

writing, too, in the editing room, a kind of writing with the spaces between words and images, so the viewer has time to think. That's real editing. And that's why I'm looking for the greatest fluidity in editing and writing. But some of my films can't be called 'light'. *Vagabond* has heavy subject matter, but in the long travelling shots there's a fluidity which carries you along like a river.

CD: Does it help you to start to think about the commentary?

AV: I'm in the editing room and I write the commentary. We record it, lay it on the images, and if it doesn't work we change the edit. In *Cléo* from 5 to 7, there's also a search for a kind of diversion that comes in the real-time aspect of the film, and this is as much the subject of the film as is Cléo's fear of dying. It's a way of saying, "I'm dying, but face to face with time, in real-time and subjective time." It's a fascinating subject: real-time in geographically accurate space. In other words, no cheating, even though we know that the language of cinema is full of ellipses and gaps.

CD: Yes, it's the expression of your "desire to explore form" in this film, like the travelling shots in *Vagabond*.

AV: Yes. That's why I tell myself that I had certain images as a starting point for *Cléo*. The metronome, like the one a pianist uses – tick, tock – and a violin. The metronome is time – 5.05, 5.10 – and the violin is Cléo's interior emotional world. There are charming moments in the film, a song to make you cry, life with all its palpitations, rising and falling, and with tick-tock, tick-tock at the same time. What I tried to do with *Cléo* was ask how we perceive time. *Cléo* is an hour and a half, she goes to the doctor's, gets a diagnosis, goes to the radio station, sings a song. The spectators aren't obliged to see the theme or construction, or the ideas and work behind it. I tried to make it so that it feels like it flows like, well, a river.

CD: I can't think of another filmmaker who could collect all their work together in the way you have in the box-set.

AV: Even I was impressed! There are rough versions of the openings of *La Mélange* (1959) and *Christmas Carol* (1966), with the 19-year-old Depardieu, who's magnificent. So there's the films I didn't get to make and then there's life, because Jacques and I lived together, had a family,

How do I film Jacques Demy, ill and dying? In a way that you had the impression that only I could have done it like that

we travelled, went to festivals. I said to myself, "I haven't actually filmed much." I knew Chabrol, who made a film every year, and Benoît Jacquot, who for the last 20 years has made a film a year. So, while there are 22 discs in the box-set, considering that I've worked for 60 years, it's not much.

In choosing the images for the booklet in the box-set, I realised that finally I've essentially been interested in life and art [and how they interrelate]... When I'm telling a story of breaking up with someone [for example, in *Documenteur*, 1981], I was interested in showing one naked body alone and another naked body alone, separated in the film. That's to say, that the idea of 'separate bodies' [*separation de corps*] in the film is produced by separating them by other images. I was trying to answer the question: is there a formal equivalent to an idea? Did you know that the legal phrase is 'judicial separation' [*séparation de corps*]? It's the first step in divorce. So I typed this phrase into my typewriter and said to myself, "I'm a filmmaker, so how do I represent the 'judicial separation of bodies'? I know. I'll film one naked body over here, another over there."

How do I film Jacques Demy, ill and dying? And if I want to be as close to him as possible? Film him close up, but not intimately, not naked on a bed or anything like that. Just his face and hands, things that anyone could see. But I filmed it in a way that you had the impression that only I could have done it like that. I made these beautiful shots with the camera closing in on his skin, then on his arm with his hairs standing up on end, and coming to rest on his wedding ring. I see those shots and I want to cry. Sometimes Jacques would say, "Why are you doing that?" I'd say, "Look, it's my film." And he'd say, "OK, fine." What can you do for someone who's dying? You can be near them, talk to them, sleep alongside them. We slept together until the last night. He didn't understand why I was filming this way because it wasn't his way of approaching things. He made some truly beautiful films, full of feeling, but he didn't tend to look for a graphic or pictorial form to take the place of story, psychology, or dialogue – because he wrote great dialogue and excellent songs. Jacques' films are delicious and tragic and sad, with war and separation in them, but to film him like that, in a particular state of realist reverie, made me realise how different we are. 

i Agnès Varda will be giving a talk on 3 May at the Brighton Festival (2-24 May), which will also show a short selection of her films and an installation. The *Tout(e) Varda* box-set, comprising 36 films, is released by Arte Editions and Ciné-Tamaris

RIDING THE WAVE

In a piece written shortly before his recent death, **Gilberto Perez** pays tribute to Varda's rich visual clarity and moral sensitivity

Agnès Varda began as a photographer. The sole woman among the young directors of the *nouvelle vague*, she wasn't bred on movies but discovered them as she came to make them. Although she had made two features and three shorts when she was invited to Cuba in 1962, she brought along a Leica rather than a movie camera and took some 4,000 photos that she spent six months arranging into a half-hour film. Documentaries often resort to still photographs for images of the past, but the images she put together in *Salut les Cubains* (1963), her greeting to the Cuban revolution in its early days, were a document of the present. It was her considered choice to make a moving picture out of still ones, and nobody has done a better job of it. Her film nimbly sets photos dancing to Cuban music. We hear Beny Moré singing, "May only Cuban women caress your face" and watch the great Cuban singer – who died, Varda lets us know, before she finished the film – rhythmically, repeatedly, exuberantly brought to life in her animated photographs.

Introducing the film some 40 years later,

Varda asked viewers to keep in mind the context of 1962, a time when excitement about "this unique revolution" spread beyond Cuba and swept up leftists everywhere. Her "cheerful film serves as witness", she said, to the "enthusiasm, courage, work, political conviction" of the Cuban people. But now, she added, "illusions are lost" – the leader she photographed as an angel "with wings of stone" has shown himself to be a repressive dictator. She needn't worry – the cheerful witness to the energy of revolutionary aspiration has nothing to apologise for. Compare her film with her friend Chris Marker's *iCuba Sí!* (1961), which is full of parades and marching soldiers and mass rallies, displays of national strength and unity behind the leader, the familiar rhetoric of (left or right) authoritarianism. Varda concentrates on what Marker skimps: the texture and rhythm of everyday life.

Women claim much of her attention: "Cuban women, between cigars and beards", women of different social classes and skin colours, students, teachers in the literacy campaign,

Varda's evenhandedness is remarkable. And so is her feeling for the life of a place, for the way it lives in the little daily activities

militia volunteers wearing berets, pedestrians with rollers in their hair. Not that she slights men: she shows them cutting cane and playing dominoes, constructing houses for the poor and putting their hands on women's shoulders in a typically Cuban gesture of affection. And she relates the story of the few who survived a sea voyage from Mexico in a cramped boat and became rebels in the sierra: "Here's to the seasick revolutionaries." They're all in this together, and Varda gives them all equal weight, women and men, the seasick revolutionaries and the peasants, the stonemason and the architect, the vanguard artists and the kids playing ball by the old cathedral of Havana, the political leader (Fidel Castro) and the musical king (Beny Moré). Her evenhandedness is remarkable. And so is her feeling for the life of a place, for the way place lives not so much in the big events as in the little daily activities and recurrences.

Place comes to the fore in such various Varda movies as *La Pointe Courte*, *Diary of a Pregnant Woman*, *Daguerréotypes*, *Mur murs* and *Jacquot de Nantes*, her portrait, made when he was dying, of her husband Jacques Demy as a boy, a mechanic's son and budding filmmaker growing up in Nantes. Her picture of the streets of Paris in *Cléo from 5 to 7* vividly renders the look and feel of a late afternoon in the city on the first day of summer, more of a counterpoint



'Here's to the seasick revolutionaries': Agnès Varda visited Cuba in the early 60s to shoot stills, which she later assembled in her film *Salut les Cubains* (1963)

than a background to the story of Cléo, a beautiful pop singer anxiously awaiting the result of her medical tests for cancer.

Cléo from 5 to 7 ostensibly unfolds in real time. A division into chapters lays out a precise chronology, running continuously from five in the afternoon to half past six (rather than the purported seven), with titles every few minutes indicating the time ('Chapitre VII CLÉO de 17h.38 à 17h.45'). A working clock is inadmissible on the stage, Walter Benjamin said: "Even in a naturalistic play, astronomical time would clash with theatrical time." What about Varda's working clock? When people speak of 'real time' in the movies they usually mean long takes and few cuts – Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), for example. But in real life all that happens in *Rope* couldn't possibly happen in an hour and a half: rather than in astronomical time, Hitchcock's movie takes place in theatrical time. Varda's movie often cuts but never seems to skip – or at least so the chapter titles keep telling us.

OF TIME AND THE CITY

Let's see what Cléo does as the clock ticks from five to six-thirty. She consults a fortune teller, walks to a café, tries on hats at a shop, buys one, takes a cab to her loft where her rich lover pays her a visit, and rehearses songs with her composer and her lyricist, who belittle her and make her angry. She takes off her wig and walks out, plays one of her songs in the jukebox at a café where no one listens, goes to see her friend Dorothée, a model at a sculpture class, rides with her around the sunny and shadowy city and watches with her a short slapstick movie about looking on the bright or the dark side of things. Then Cléo takes a cab to a pretty park where she encounters Antoine, a young soldier near the end of his leave, a chatty stranger who manages to engage her in conversation and rides by her side on a bus – nicer than a cab, he says – to the hospital where she is to meet her doctor and get her test results. Surely nobody could fit all that into a mere hour and a half. Though much looser dramatically than *Rope*, and much closer to documentary, *Cléo from 5 to 7* nevertheless takes place in theatrical time – in the time of actions staged in a way that makes them tighter, more concentrated than life.

The clock time introducing each chapter serves to show the difference, Varda has said, "between objective time and the subjective time experienced by the character". But the indicated durations, which accord with our clock time in the audience, can't actually represent the clock time of events in the film – though we get caught up in the illusion that the two coincide, the illusion of 'real time'. So it isn't only the character's subjective experience of time, but ours, that is brought into play. Our sense of time is no more objective – no more 'real' – than Cléo's. *Cléo from 5 to 7* is about the inevitable subjectivity of our perception of things, whether in reality or on the screen.

Death and the maiden: Varda had postcards of Hans Baldung Grien's paintings on that theme tacked up during the filming, but her even-tempered approach is nothing like Baldung Grien's shocking juxtapositions of beauty and cadaverousness. Death is no horror

Varda has a light touch. Let us praise her as an old master who looks at life's troubles with clear-eyed equanimity

in *Cléo from 5 to 7*; its impending possibility is simply one aspect of the flow of existence. The beautiful maiden may not have long to live, but the time we spend with her as the clock ticks away is a casual, meandering, uneventful stretch of everyday life. Immediate things are put on equal footing with ultimate things.

Cléo can be seen as a frivolous beauty who becomes a more genuine human being in the face of mortality. Her taking her wig off has been construed as the start of her transformation. But her own blonde hair isn't much different from her wig: her beauty is no false adornment she can shed, but something integral to her character. Varda avoids the platitude that beauty is only skin-deep. A nude model is the first true friend Cléo encounters that afternoon, and when she expresses her own unwillingness to pose naked ("I'd feel so exposed, afraid they'd find a fault"), Dorothée responds that her body makes her happy, not proud. Cléo's vanity and self-absorption are portrayed as traits that may seem personal, individualistic, but in fact are socially acquired, one of the hazards of being beautiful. "Everyone spoils me," as Cléo says: everyone in her social circle condescends to her, treats her like a pretty child, and she has accordingly been playing that role. Varda neither indulges her nor scorns her.

The relaxed naturalness of Dorothée's beauty sets off the strain and affectation of Cléo's. But Cléo's beauty, which is after all a blessing as well as a burden, draws Antoine to her in the park – on the bus he even asks her for a picture – and with Antoine, who like Dorothée offers her an alternative to vogueish society, Cléo begins to relax. And so this film about mortality turns into a comedy of sorts, a boy-meets-girl story. Or rather, a

possible comedy just as the death-and-the-maiden story is a possible tragedy: neither story is played up dramatically or brought to narrative closure. Varda has a light touch. Her rhetoric, her way of engaging the audience, is unstressed, easygoing. "About suffering they were never wrong," The Old Masters: how well they understood/ Its human position; how it takes place/ While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along," wrote W.H. Auden. Let us now praise Agnès Varda as an old master who looks at life's troubles with clear-eyed equanimity.

In *Le Bonheur* (1965) her guiding image of happiness is the brightly coloured scenery of impressionist painting. The impressionists painted the momentary impression, the visitor's gladdening view of the countryside, a pastoral not of the landed gentry but of ordinary people enjoying a break. *Le Bonheur* is a working-class pastoral – its main characters are a carpenter, his seamstress wife, their two children, and a postal worker who becomes his lover – but these are not visitors, they live and work right there, they inhabit a fairytale idyll that in the actual world could never last. When the carpenter tells his wife about his affair, he assures her that if she wishes he will give up the other woman, but his wife, though hesitant, smilingly accepts his happiness and they make love tenderly. Yet afterward, when he wakes up, she is gone. He searches for her everywhere and finds her drowned body. She has, it seems, committed suicide. He mourns her but doesn't wait very long to marry the other woman ("I still want to be happy"). The story unfolds over the course of a summer. Autumnal shades envelop the reconstituted family out in the woods at the film's end.

Where's the snake in this garden? All the characters are nice and sweet. *Le Bonheur* enacts a flower child's fantasy of love in accord with nature. But for all their picnics on the grass, the carpenter's wife loves her husband in conformity with the norms of society, and her death pulls the happy fantasy up short. Isn't he to blame, a selfish patriarchal husband who cheats on



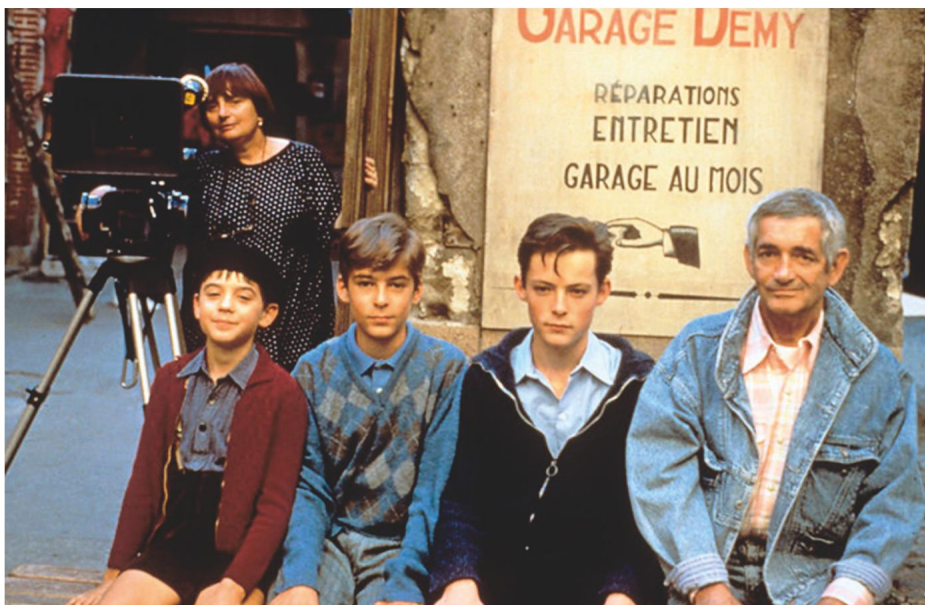
In the swing of things: Corinne Marchand (left) and Dominique Davray in *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1961)

his wife and wants her to like it, drives her to suicide and then blithely replaces her with the other woman? To characterise him in this way is to pass a moral judgement that the film purposefully withholds. Varda repudiates the pieties of established society even as she calls into question the flower child's fantasy. She unsettles us by her steady refusal to moralise. Rhetoric is supposed to be rousing, exhortative, judgemental – everything *Le Bonheur* is not. It exemplifies how potent tranquil rhetoric can be.

One Sings, the Other Doesn't (*L'une chante, l'autre pas*, 1976) is a story of friendship between two women – one bold, the other shy; one from the urban bourgeoisie, the other from the peasantry; one who sings, the other who doesn't – and a chronicle of 15 years of struggle for women's rights in France. It's also, like *Le Bonheur*, something of a fairytale. Varda called it "a mix of dream and documentary" – an apt combination for a story of aspiration and reality. The two women, Pomme and Suzanne, become friends when very young in the early 60s – Pomme lies to her parents so as to extract money from them to give Suzanne for an abortion in Switzerland – and do not meet again until the early 1970s, when their paths cross at a demonstration outside the courthouse in Bobigny, the site of a historic abortion trial that led to the eventual legalisation of contraception and abortion in France.

A woman's right not to have a baby unites and reunites Pomme and Suzanne. One sings feminist songs, the other starts a centre for family planning. This movie is decidedly pro-choice. But it also portrays a woman's joy in maternity, in the body that bears children and in the children borne, two by Suzanne we see grow up and two by Pomme with the Iranian husband she loves but leaves. Pomme had an abortion herself – in Amsterdam, where she met this amiable Iranian who reverts to patriarchal custom when they settle in his native land – and she cannot accept the constrictions of her marriage, returning to France and her singing. But she embraces motherhood and celebrates it in her songs as part of womanhood. "It's beyond unconventional," exclaims her husband when, given his insistence on taking their infant son back to Iran with him, she proposes they have another baby so that each can have one. "It's utopian." This utopian movie is in the truest sense 'pro-life' too. Varda's evenhandedness is no wavering moderation but an immoderate openness to variegated human experience.

Fiction movies with elements of documentary, documentaries with elements of fiction: such has been Varda's way. Documentarians come in two kinds, those who stay out of the picture, as if they were just witnessing a reality unaltered by their presence, and those who include themselves in the picture, in the reality documented. Frederick Wiseman believes that his subjects are oblivious to his unobtrusive presence; Varda makes herself and her activity manifest to the viewer. She shows her hand in *The Gleaners and I* (2000), shows us both her aged hands, one holding her little digital camera as it takes a close view of the other. There's too much of her in the picture, one of the gleaners objects in the sequel she made two years later,



The child in time: *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991) saw three young actors play Jacques Demy (right) as a boy

and others have raised the same objection; but if her personal sensibility centres this freewheeling documentary, she extends to her subjects a broad and lively generosity of attention.

To glean, Varda explains at the start, is to gather leftovers after the harvest. "In times past only women gleaned," she says, as in Millet's famous picture of stooping *glaneuses* gathering wheat in a field. "Gleaning might be extinct but stooping has not vanished from our sated society," she continues. "In the towns today as in the fields yesterday, gleaners still humbly stoop to glean." Now men as well as women go out gleaning, she notes, but gleaners today go it alone, not in groups as paintings almost always represented them. Her picture brings together gleaners of all sorts, those who gather oysters at low tide or discarded potatoes of the wrong size or shape for the market, search in the trash for edible food or for usable castoffs on the sidewalk, pick up

things here and there and appropriate them for practical or decorative purposes or arrange them into works of art – which is what she, herself a *glaneuse*, is doing, as if the magic of art could fashion a human community out of solitary modern gleaning. Heart-shaped potatoes, which may not be marketable but are dear to her heart, Varda makes into an emblem of her movie, a symbol of her fondness for those deemed unfit for our society – the heart shape here signifying both affection and oddity. At the end, in yet another variant of gleaning, she asks the curator and her assistant at a provincial museum to rummage in their dusty storeroom for a slumbering painting from the 19th century, Edmond Hédouin's *Gleaners Fleeing Before the Storm*, a large canvas they carry outside as the wind gusts and we hear sounds of stormy weather: a memorable closing metaphor for all of us gleaners fleeing before the storm of modern life. ㊟



'A mix of dream and documentary': *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* (1976)

PREVIEW

THE ANDERSEN TAPES

Thom Andersen's work reveals a grudge-holder, an enthusiast, a holder of eccentric opinions – and a master of the essay film

By Nick Pinkerton

Thom Andersen is not reconciled. Scholar, filmmaker, CalArts professor, and author of one of the only really essential 'video essays' of the 21st century, Andersen is a cussed, ornery, idiosyncratic outsider who unlooses rhetorical cannons on canons, and never met a consensus he liked.

Andersen's magnum opus, *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, first appeared in 2003. He turned 60 that year, and the movie has the feel of a life's work, a clearing house for notebooks full of jotted ideas, private enthusiasms, and rankling grudges. In Andersen's three-hour video essay, in which he contradicts the myths perpetuated in Hollywood movies that falsify the solid facts of Los Angeles, here are some of the fights he picks: Geographic license, Hollywood's war against modernist architecture, the diminutive 'L.A.', the Hollywood Walk of Fame, David Thomson (who "loves everything about America except what's worth loving"), Henry Jaglom, Woody Allen and his fans ("middlebrow middle-class people who

believe what they read in the *New York Times*"), cynicism ("the dominant myth of our times"), and Joan Didion, whose encomiums to the highway system are dismissed as "mystical blatherings."

Andersen's enthusiasms are just as individual: his film's namesake, Fred Halsted's little-seen *L.A. Plays Itself* (1972), is identified as a "gay porn masterpiece". Andersen has kind words for a 1994 erotic thriller called *A Passion to Kill*, and extols *The Exiles* (1961), Kent MacKenzie's neorealist drama about American Indians in Los Angeles' since-bulldozed Bunker Hill neighbourhood, and the films of the 'L.A. Rebellion', black filmmakers who emerged in the 1970s from UCLA film school.

Andersen was in grad school at UCLA himself when he produced *Eadweard Muybridge, Zoopraxographer* (1974) as his master's thesis. This is an hour-long biography of the Anglo-American photographer told through his images, the scrupulously researched narration accompanying examples of Muybridge's still photography and 'zoopraxography' – sequential studies of animal and human locomotion that were precursors to motion pictures. Already Andersen shows an interest in teasing out the social history embedded in the history of the photographic image, dwelling on Muybridge's stereographic pictures of the Modoc Indian War and South American coffee plantations, while seeming to celebrate his

subject for challenging the sexual mores of "a culture which associates evil with materiality".

This concern with 'materiality' undergirds Andersen's whole filmography. The man who nearly 30 years later would praise 'Toby' Halecki's demolition-derby classic *Gone in 60 Seconds* (1974) as a "materialist masterpiece" opens *Eadweard Muybridge* with a quote from Mao Zedong: "There is nothing in this world except matter in motion." The cinematic image is not autonomous but remains tethered and beholden to the reality it captures. Andersen's project is locating film history against the gridwork of time and space, a passion for the concrete which can even be discerned in his first known short, 1965's *Melting*, a document of an ice cream sundae doing exactly that in real time.

After the Muybridge film, Andersen seemed to decide on teaching and scholarship as his *métier*. He joined the faculty of the Center for Media Studies at the University at Buffalo in 1976, later heading to Ohio State University, where one of his colleagues in the department of photography and cinema was

Andersen has a reputation as a debunker, but the works made after 'Los Angeles Plays Itself' are based in enthusiasms



Do the locomotion: *Eadweard Muybridge, Zoopraxographer* (1974)

Noël Burch, an American expat based for much of his career in Paris, and a film historian whose scholarly practice extended into filmmaking. Burch and Andersen's eventual collaboration, *Red Hollywood* (1995), had its origins in an essay of the same title that Andersen had published ten years earlier, around the time he and Burch were essentially 'purged' from the OSU faculty, scarcely noticed casualties in the Culture Wars.

The intent of *Red Hollywood* was to "isolate [the] contribution to the Hollywood cinema" of "the victims of the Hollywood blacklist", seeking, in particular, political content in the films they were credited for. Looking over the Hollywood "Walk of Shame" in *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, Andersen notes that informers are honoured while the men and women whose careers were crippled by the blacklist are not. History, as Andersen notes elsewhere in the film, is written by the victors, and one way to interpret his work is as alternative history – a People's History, if we want to get all Howard Zinn. The narrator of *Los Angeles Plays Itself* tells us that only "one in 40" Los Angelenos works in films, Andersen implicitly including himself among "the rest of us".

Red Hollywood contains original interviews with then still-living blacklist targets, though it mainly comprises excerpts from some 50 films, from the 30s to the early 50s, on which Communist Party USA members worked; a contextualising narration is delivered by L.A. Rebellion director Billy Woodberry. In most cases the future blacklisted were responsible for scripts; showing clips from their films, Andersen and Burch flout auteurist protocol by identifying only the screenwriter. While some titles may be familiar, others are works of no great reputation, and no qualitative distinction is made between hackwork and, say, the *sui generis* films of blacklisted screenwriter-cum-director Abraham Polonsky. The effect is to reduce the movies discussed to product delivering ideological content – which is what Andersen wants.

Though Andersen has a reputation as a debunker or decrier, the works made after *Los Angeles Plays Itself* are based in enthusiasms. Following that film, which advocated for "a city of walkers, a cinema of walking", Andersen made 2010's *Get Out of the Car*, a 16mm city symphony of signs, murals, and graffiti as captured on the streets of the city from a pedestrian's viewpoint. While that film picks through the flotsam and jetsam of a Los Angeles that ruthlessly disposes of its own history, *Reconversão* (2012) takes as its subject the Portuguese architect Eduardo Souto de Moura and his buildings, often constructed around the long-enduring granite ruins found in the north of his country. Discussing, in *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, the conversion of the streamlined modern Pan-Pacific Auditorium into a roller disco for the film *Xanadu* (1980), Andersen notes that this is "what the preservationists call 'adoptive re-use'". The phrase could describe Andersen's own collage practice, and the work of Souto de Moura. An interview with the architect ends the film, which otherwise consists of images of his buildings shot with a DSLR camera in a series of choppy stills that recall the zoopraxiscope.

A fascination with architecture and city planning is evident in *Los Angeles Plays Itself*,



City of angels: *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003)

which documents the screen 'careers' of various Los Angeles landmarks, including the Bradbury Building, Frank Lloyd Wright's Aztec Ennis House, and modernist and International Style houses by John Lautner, Pierre Koenig and Richard Neutra – the sort of thing described as "dead-tech post-modernistic bullshit" by Al Pacino's character in Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995), which Andersen has treated to a few strafings.

Andersen, who lives in one of the many houses in Los Angeles designed by the Austrian Rudolph Michael Schindler, is deeply invested in the "Utopian aspirations" of the modernist project as well as, as *Red Hollywood* attests, another brand of idealism since fallen from favour. High moral dudgeon at the betrayal of cherished ideals drives Andersen's work. In *Reconversão*, he quotes the Italian architect Aldo Rossi: "There's no ideological justification for bad architecture." In these words one can identify something near the axiom expressed in *Los Angeles Plays Itself*: "Silly geography makes for silly movies."

That Andersen's indignation is grounded in disappointed aspiration is evident in the call-to-arms postscript of his latest work, *The Thoughts That Once We Had*, which concludes: "To those who have nothing... we must restore... the cinema." Clocking in just shy of two hours and consisting largely of excerpts from various films of all periods and places, D.W. Griffith to Hou Hsiao-Hsien, it is Andersen's most ambitious exercise in the compilation film since *Los Angeles Plays Itself* – and further proof



The Thoughts That Once We Had

that he's loath to repeat tactics. The film clips are mostly unlabelled, while archival footage (including images from the Siege of Stalingrad, a Symbionese Liberation Army bank job and North Vietnamese Army propaganda) gets only a cursory introduction. Commentary is provided by title cards, most quoting Gilles Deleuze's writings on the cinema, though such interjections as an ALLCAPS repudiation of *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) appear to be Andersen's own.

The Thoughts That Once We Had is startlingly wide-ranging. An appreciation of the actor Timothy Carey shades into one of Marlon Brando, linked by a scene they share in Brando's *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961). A digression on Chubby Checker's hijacking of R&B vocalist Hank Ballard's 'The Twist' precedes clips from Charlie Chaplin's *The Idle Class* (1921), Wim Wenders's *The American Friend* (1977) and Errol Morris's *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) – all films dealing with misdirection and imposture, illustrating Deleuze's idea of the "deceptive image".

Andersen's associative linkages propel the film which, leaving the viewer space to puzzle out the internal logic of its organisation, is perhaps his least didactic feature. When, for example, Deleuze is quoted on burlesque forms, with Laurel and Hardy cited as an instance of the duel that "propagates itself to infinity", we may think of the duel between capital and labour, capitalism and communism, that underlies much of the 20th-century history we've seen – this is a moment before Andersen makes a lateral move from the Marx Brothers trio to the deadly triangle in Shinoda Masahiro's *Pale Flower* (1964). Subtitled 'A personal history of the cinema', *The Thoughts That Once We Had* is also the film in which Andersen's profound scepticism towards the movies, the subject of his life's study, is in contrast with an evident thrall to the cinematic image. Andersen, the stern materialist and policeman of artistic licence, confesses that his favourite movie star is Debra Paget, accompanying this revelation with a clip of her 'snake dance' in Fritz Lang's lavish, ludicrous 1959 fable *The Indian Tomb*. We all, I suppose, have our soft spots. 📺

i Thom Andersen is a guest at the inaugural edition of the Essay Film Festival, taking place in London from March 24-29. See essayfilmfestival.com

IN THE DISCOMFORT ZONE

In Joanna Bruzdowicz's spare and unsettling music, Agnès Varda has found the ideal complement to her austere, compassionate vision

By Frances Morgan

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Agnès Varda's *Vagabond*. In an interview for *Sight & Sound* in 2010 she referred to the film as a "mistake" – not for any aesthetic shortcomings but because it was an unexpected success, which, as Daniel Trilling wrote, "gave people unrealistic expectations of what would follow". But Varda can scarcely have expected this austere film, which tells in flashback the story of a young vagrant woman's journey through autumn and winter in a remote part of southern France, to have been the award-winning hit it turned out to be. In every frame it is apparent that the film was made, as Varda told *Film Quarterly* soon after release, "with no compromising at all with my way of working". Sandrine Bonnaire's devastating central performance as Mona is intercut with staged interviews in which those she has encountered on her journey talk about her, as if for a documentary. Her interactions with these and other characters, including a self-righteous philosopher turned goat farmer and a kind but ultimately indifferent academic, offer a highly critical examination of our attitudes towards those on the margins of society (that is, the attitudes of a potential audience that would include such academics and would-be radicals); how far we are prepared to help, care for or engage with them and what, consciously or unconsciously, we expect in return.

Formally and politically the film is rigorous, but it has a deeply sympathetic emotional core; it makes sense, then, that its non-diegetic music consists of excerpts from the first string quartet, 'La Vita', by the Polish composer Joanna Bruzdowicz – equally precise and spare, yet intimate and demanding.

"You hear the music on its own in the film," Varda explains in a short film, *Music and Travels*, that comes with the Artificial Eye DVD of *Vagabond*. "It's not background music. It's not music to emphasise the scene." To ensure this, Varda and Bruzdowicz together chose 12 fragments from the quartet's second movement to accompany a series of 12 tracking shots which appear throughout the film, all showing Mona walking through different locations. Varda calls them the 'Grand Series', which would suggest an epic quality, the lone girl under big skies or hiking through spectacular terrain, were it not that Varda has little truck with the epic or romantic, even in a film like this one, which offers every excuse to indulge those tendencies. Mona's landscapes are ploughed fields, blank streets in ugly small towns, go-kart tracks and dilapidated farmyards. As in Bruno Dumont's *Hors Satan* (2011), with its harsh agricultural setting, these mundane non-spaces feel weirdly sentient. In Varda's film, the effect is achieved by lingering on certain visual correspondences between the sequences, both abstract patterns – of road markings, railings, stacked pallets, branches



'An impossible portrait': Sandrine Bonnaire plays the young homeless drifter in *Vagabond* (1985)

– and more obvious echoes, such as repeated images of farm machinery and phone boxes.

Bruzdowicz's music is a crucial part of what Varda calls "this hook-and-eye link", this sense of threads that, though they are pulled far apart, hold the film together. The string quartet's four voices enforce a close connection with the music's structure, most strongly characterised by variations on a seven-note pattern that brings to mind Olivier Messiaen's use of modes instead of specific keys (Bruzdowicz studied with Messiaen). As in Messiaen's chamber music, this conveys a logic, a system, yet also an unmoored, constantly shifting quality, since there is no tonic note for the music to resolve to; the effect is emphasised by an ametrical rhythm, precise yet not clearly anchored to beats in a bar. Messiaen wrote of the "charm of impossibilities" held within what he termed the modes of limited transposition; Varda, in that *Film Quarterly* interview, calls *Vagabond*

Varda has little truck with the epic or romantic even in a film like 'Vagabond', which offers every excuse to indulge in them

"an impossible portrait" of Mona – she is essentially unknowable, obfuscated by all these perspectives, all these assumptions, including our own. The impossibility of any mode is that it can only be transposed so many times before it becomes itself again; perhaps we can only understand a certain amount about another human before hitting the dead end of ourselves, our preconceptions and conditioning.

As Varda recounts in *Music and Travels*, she discovered Bruzdowicz's music by chance. She asked a shop assistant for recommendations of female composers, and on hearing Bruzdowicz's quartet was immediately struck by it. It is the



Jacquot de Nantes (1991)



The Beaches of Agnès (2008)

kind of instinctual, open-minded decision that one imagines guides much of Varda's work but Varda's sense of authorship was strong enough for her to ask the composer to edit her work and recombine it into a pared-down version, which was recorded for the film. Although Bruzdowicz is a seasoned TV and film composer, you imagine that she might not have welcomed the request to mess around with an existing piece of music. Yet it was the start of a working relationship that has endured for many years, with Bruzdowicz contributing to films including *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991), *The Gleaners and I* (2000), and *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008). Although she is often neglected in accounts of the 'Polish school' of avant-garde composers who emerged in the 1960s – born in 1943, she is a generation younger than Witold Lutoslawski, 10 years younger than Krzysztof Penderecki – Bruzdowicz is none the less part of the same experimental tradition, characterised less by adherence to formal rules and more a preoccupation with manipulating tone and timbre. It's perhaps because of this that the music of Penderecki and Bruzdowicz lends itself so well to modernist cinema: what is often heard as intense or jarring can signify tension, alienation, or multiple or fractured perspectives.

The music Bruzdowicz composed for Varda's *The Gleaners and I* is discomfiting, too, but in a wholly different way. Again it is chamber music, and once more has the fluid but precise motion of her music for *Vagabond*. And it is also used for someone on the move – in this case Varda, filming from her car window as she travels through similar landscapes to those of *Vagabond*, meeting those who forage and collect the leftovers of vineyards, orchards and potato fields. But this music, rather than angular, is dreamlike and often gentle, with a vibraphone chiming a cyclical melody as Varda gazes out at trucks on a rainy motorway. It is the soundtrack to not only literal journeys but also Varda's meditations on ageing and memory. As she sorts through souvenirs of a trip to Japan, chromatic figures are played gently on a piano, drifting like thoughts as they modulate back and forth. Varda surveys her hand in close-up ("to enter into the horror of it"), films its wrinkles, and says that it appears to be that of "an animal I don't know". Yet there is no horror in the music, just wonder. Its sense of constant movement is quietly in sympathy with the unwillingness – inability – of Varda and her subjects to stay still. ❸

i See our essay and interview with Agnès Varda on page 46



The Gleaners and I (2000)

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

As a woman working in an unregarded genre, the Russian director Esfir Shub has been neglected for too long



By Bryony Dixon

In the film world, Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov are household names, but Esfir Shub – not so much. The woman who taught Eisenstein how to edit has to be constantly rediscovered. Actually, 'taught' might be a bit strong – perhaps 'mentored' is a better word. Certainly he learned from her, consulting her on the script for *Strike* (1925) and corresponding with her for years. Vertov was inspired by watching her, at the state-owned film studio Goskino, recut imported films to create coherent narratives that would suit Soviet tastes.

Part of the reason she gets overlooked is that, as Martin Stollery points out in his article 'Eisenstein, Shub and the gender of author as producer', she was working in a new, unrecognised genre. This genre is sometimes dismissed as 'compilation film', a title that implies the simple cutting together of footage on broadly thematic or illustrative lines – as distinct from the 'essay film', which connotes an individual, expert thesis with a weight of respectability derived from its academic and literary antecedents. Shub's project was to produce nothing less than a history of the Revolution using only old actuality footage. In the silent era, the clarity of her message relied entirely on her editing skills and some elegantly sparse intertitles and a few quotations.

The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty is a deceptively simple tour de force of creative editing, a 'montage of film documents' which shoulders responsibility for representing a collective opinion. The film company denied her a director credit: instead, her credit reads simply "Work by Esfir Shub" – though I've seen it translated as "A work by Esfir Shub", which makes all the difference: "A work by" suggests intellectual ownership but also concedes to the constructivist ideal of filmmaker as worker, in a process where all were expected to work for the common goal. This was not history for idle interest but history as revolutionary act, designed to inspire and agitate.

Like Eisenstein, Shub was called upon to make films celebrating various revolutionary anniversaries. While he made fiction, carefully constructing a reputation as an individual creative genius in the Western manner, she chose real history and relative anonymity: it is significant that it was a woman who pioneered a genre based on repudiation of established notions of authorship. With few resources Shub assembled huge quantities of footage from cellars and attics across the land, including home movies plundered from the Tsar's palace, cataloguing and describing everything to create an archive

I like to think of her as a kind of Adam Curtis, sitting surrounded by thousands of reels of images



Eisenstein's mentor: Esfir Shub

for further use as she edited together her story. I like to think of her as a kind of Adam Curtis, sitting surrounded by thousands of reels of images, cleverly juxtaposing them for effect, adding the odd comment through words on screen, allowing the pictures to tell their truth without pedantically explaining them.

In these terms one could see Shub and contemporary film essayists as sharing a mission and a methodology, getting their messages across using recycled imagery chosen from a mass of footage originally shot by others for other purposes. In 1927 manipulation of the images was necessarily minimal – only juxtaposition carried meaning; Shub didn't use fiction film or restaged action, as Vertov did. The re-use of found footage had been going on since film was invented – *L'Affaire Dreyfus* (1898) used existing film of locations to pad out the few seconds of footage of Dreyfus himself. In the 1920s the repurposing of footage from the previous two decades was commonplace in the commercial world. The British Pathé company, for example, scooped the world by producing what it called *The History of the Great War* in 1917 – an impressive title for a modest series of eight short films all using recut historical footage – a year and a half before the war ended. These short episodes could be classed as compilation films, but Shub's works are something more – if not essay films, then certainly approaching that.

For further evidence of her creativity, try *Komsomol, Patron of Electrification* (1932). Like Hitchcock, Shub plunged straight into sound film, playing with diegetic and non-diegetic sound, using imagery of music and sound-making devices, and exhibiting a delight in all the new things sound could do.

She continued to work in the Soviet film business for a remarkably long time – and as a woman, a Jew and an intellectual, it's amazing she survived at all. But she does not always receive the credit she is due – as Stollery says in relation to *Fall of the Romanovs*, "Unlike Eisenstein's *October* Shub's film could not be consumed as art." Perhaps current interest in the essay film will put her back in the spotlight. ❸



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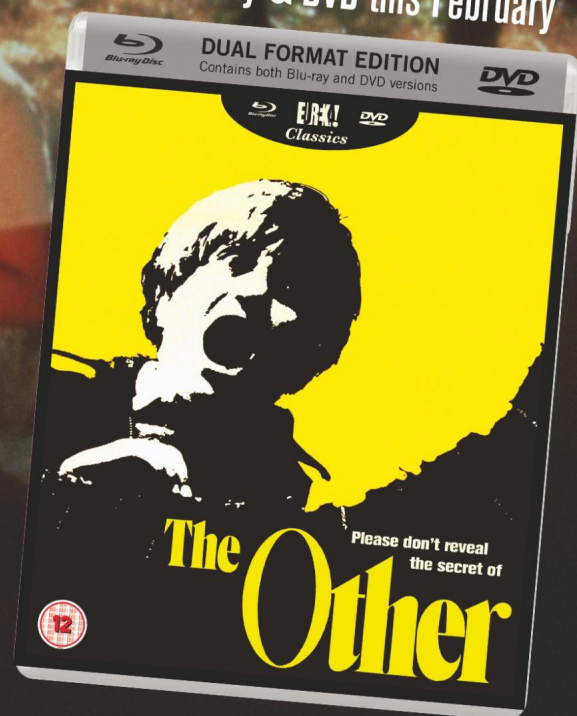
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CARPENTER NAILS IT

For decades, John Carpenter's talents as a composer have been overshadowed by his film directing. Now that is changing

By Jason Anderson

The defining characteristics of John Carpenter's scores for his own films couldn't be any clearer or more compelling for devotees like Benjamin John Power, half of the Bristol electronic duo Fuck Buttons. "It's the sense of urgency and unsettledness, which he usually achieved with minimal components," Power says. He became a Carpenter fan a decade ago after encountering the brutish electronic soundtrack of *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976) while on tour. "There is a perpetual 'lack of resolve' within his sound that elevates the drama whether you are watching the accompanying picture or not."

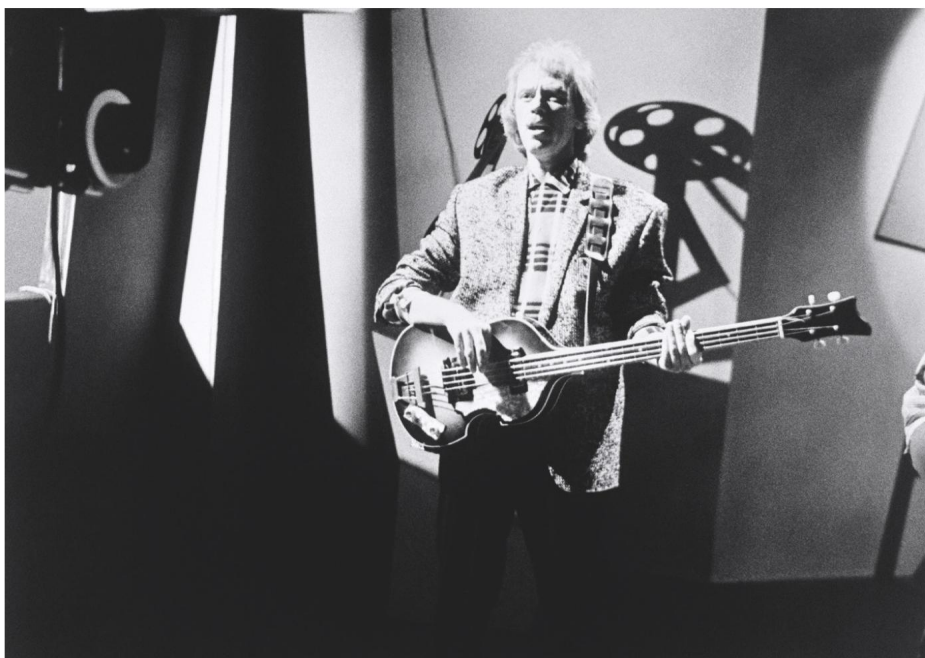
For the composer Jeff Grace, the analogue synthesisers that lend an otherworldly menace to films such as *The Fog* (1979) created an instantly recognisable sound palette, one that Grace referred to in his music for Jim Mickle's thriller *Cold in July* (2014). "When you start dealing with synthesisers, you're really walking a fine line between what's going to sound cheesy six months from now and what's going to have an enduring sound," Grace says. "But Carpenter's sound has held up much better than so many other things from the same era."

For Spencer Hickman, whose Death Waltz label has reissued a stream of Carpenter soundtrack LPs, Carpenter's music is "simple yet intricate – rhythmic, driven and completely captivating."

Now, the Sacred Bones label has issued *Lost Themes*, Carpenter's first collection of non-soundtrack music; and a number of contemporary musicians, including Benjamin John Power, have acknowledged their debt to the director by remixing tracks. The attention seems both pleasing and somewhat mystifying to Carpenter himself, who started composing his own soundtracks from necessity rather than artistic ambition. As he said recently, speaking from his office in Los Angeles, "I was cheap and fast."

Yet the scores that he created with collaborators like Alan Howarth have an enduring force and strangeness. Echoes can be heard in the work of many contemporary musicians. "When we started Death Waltz," Spencer Hickman says, "I thought a few hardcore fans would be into it, but it's amazing how his work has resonated with the wider electronic music community." Among a number of faux-Carpenter scores, the most thrilling is *DROKK: Music Inspired by Mega-City One*, a collaboration between Portishead's Geoff Barrow and the British film composer Ben Salisbury originally intended as the score for Pete Travis's film *Dredd* (2012). The Death Waltz LPs, with their specially commissioned artwork and extensive liner notes, are coveted fetish objects – "I've always had the aspiration in my life to be fetishised," Carpenter says, "so it's very fulfilling to me."

Even as Carpenter's filmmaking opportunities have dwindled – this millennium, his output consists of *Ghosts of Mars* (2001), *The Ward*



Hey Mr Bass Man: John Carpenter, early in his musical career

(2010) and two episodes for the TV anthology series *Masters of Horror* – his reputation has grown. The release of *Lost Themes* coincides with a retrospective at BAMcinématek in New York. Hollywood keeps remaking his hits of the 70s and 80s (Fox has just won a battle for the rights to *Escape from New York*). Even films that seemed destined for oblivion have been reassessed – notably *They Live* (1988), a mind-bending and ham-fisted sci-fi satire beloved of Slavoj Žižek. Films such as Joe Cornish's *Attack the Block* (2011) and Adam Wingard's *The Guest* (2014) show Carpenter's influence as visual stylist and storyteller.

Lost Themes began as a recreational project for the director and his son Cody. Between videogaming sessions, they improvised songs using new Logic Pro X digital software. "Some of it was rock 'n' roll, some of it was blues, and some of it was the score music," Carpenter says. "In other words, like a soundtrack sampler. So Cody went off to teach in Japan and I sat on it and didn't give it much thought. Then I got a new music attorney and she asked me, 'Do

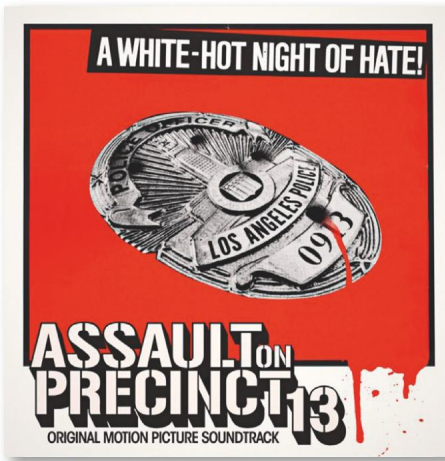
I sent my music attorney this stuff and a couple of months later, I had a record deal. I thought, 'Man, how easy is this shit?'

you have anything new?' I sent her this stuff and a couple of months later, I had a record deal. I thought, 'Man, how easy is this shit?'"

For him, making *Lost Themes* was "joyous", especially compared with the hurried sessions for his most famous scores (*Assault on Precinct 13* was done in a day). The son of a music professor, and a bass player in rock bands before the filmmaking took off, Carpenter clearly enjoys making music, but he is aware of his limitations. "Mostly I could only play really minimalistic stuff. But I got to provide another voice in directing a movie – music became another aspect of directing."

The brooding washes of synthesiser sound and arpeggiator pulses on *Lost Themes* would suit any number of Carpenter scenes – the lonely night drives of *Christine* (1983) or the Lovecraftian grotesqueries of *In the Mouth of Madness* (1994). But the record demonstrates that Carpenter's best music can stand alone. When a friend at Sacred Bones played Benjamin John Power a prerelease, "I nearly fell off my seat. When the conversation moved on to remixes, I couldn't offer my services quickly enough." Power's mix of 'Fallen', presented under his Blanck Mass pseudonym, amplifies the original track's latent menace. Other remixes were done by Zola Jesus, Jim Thirlwell of Foetus and Skinny Puppy's Nivek Ogre. Even so, *Lost Themes* may push the already stratospheric eBay prices for analogue synthesisers like Carpenter's once-trusty Prophet 5 even higher. "I think I dumped that thing years ago," Carpenter says. "I should've hung on to it!"

Lost Themes is released by Sacred Bones Records. Selected Carpenter soundtracks are available from Death Waltz



The original soundtrack for *Assault on Precinct 13*

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MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS

In films that are dense, ungraspable networks of reference, Lindsay Seers comes close to duplicating the experience of thought

By Charlie Fox

Among the new astonishments collected at the Hayward Gallery's *Mirrorcity* show this winter was Lindsay Seers's 25-minute film *Nowhere Less Now*, by then in its fourth incarnation. The exhibition's slick rubric, about bringing together contemporary artists responding to the Ballardian funhouse of modern London, led to a hallucinatory assortment of enigmatic assemblages, often found in the middle of some convulsive malfunction. Looming at the edge of this magical junkyard was the huge upturned silver ship in which Seers's latest film was screened.

Seers's films are difficult to see, made with a particular location in mind – so that, for example, the version of *Monocular* (2012) she prepared for a gallery in Finland differs from the version at Margate – and shown only inside site-specific sculptural environments that reconstruct some potent symbol from the film, such as a church or a circus tent. Watching their wild associative spirals unfurl can make you feel as if you've fallen into an especially rich kind of fever.

In the course of nearly a decade's compulsive filmmaking, Seers has created a mammoth project that juxtaposes bewildering personal mythology with reveries on the sinister recesses of the past. In *Extramission 6 (Black Maria)* (2009) the story is frequently repeated of how Seers didn't speak until she was eight years old: she was jolted into speech by discovering a photograph of herself, asking her mother, "Is that me?" Her films are also haunted by unfamiliar selves. As a child she had an eidetic memory, recalling images with photographic clarity, plus noises and textures; but this faculty began to fade as soon as she started to speak. In mourning for her previously flawless memory, she transformed herself into a human camera, stowing photographic paper in her mouth and using her mouth as an aperture, making a collection of Gothic snapshots soaked with her blood and the imprints of her teeth. Nothing else quite matches the spectral thrill of watching Seers reconstruct these experiments in *Extramission 6*, stalking through a field at night with her head in a black sack and her mouth aglow. Fuzzily caught on videotape, this looks like hoax footage of a magical creature, which perhaps is what she was. But there's no telling what's real and what isn't. Watching these films in pursuit of a flesh-and-blood figure is like attempting to find factual verification for a ghost story. Doubles abound: psychiatrists speculate on Seers's disconcerting talents and speak of her as if she recently vanished. She reappears as a vampire, a vaudevillian, or alone on stage like a boyish mannequin in *Entangled* (2012) – but perhaps that was an actor? – or else she's nowhere to be found, transforming what seemed to be self-portraits into a collection of ominous case studies. What might have been a toxic proposition, awkwardly attempting a spooky fracturing of



Hello sailor: *Nowhere Less Now* as seen in 2012

the self, complete with the ghoulish mannequin understudies once favoured by Cindy Sherman, becomes the stuff of creepily fascinating art. This is not a career in any commonsensical form at all, but a daring performance in which she assumes the roles of occultist, psychogeographer, ventriloquist and historian.

When I meet Seers at her studio in North London, she draws a parallel between her works and novels such as *Robinson Crusoe*, which purport to be factual recollections but spring from an utterly imaginary figure. As another formal ancestor, she invokes the deranged monologue of the solitary walker in Georg Büchner's literary fragment *Lenz*, which is often read as an early evocation of schizophrenia. Even at its most diaristic, her work demands a huge quantity of research. Occult signals are collected and peculiar regional histories are studied. Interviews are conducted – sometimes under hypnosis – with carefully chosen participants whose speech is recorded and fed back into the soundtrack of the films. Then Seers trawls her enormous archive of footage in hope of catching stray or suddenly arresting material that might provide another skein of suggestions for this new work. She insists that she isn't a filmmaker but an artist: indeed, her recent works don't often lapse into familiar territories of filmmaking but take a recondite personal form that remains gamely resistant to anything like full comprehension, even after multiple viewings.

The audience for *Nowhere Less Now* is led into the dark and required to block the sounds of the outside world with headphones, become enveloped in the dense mesh of its score and

Lindsay Seers's recent works remain gamely resistant to anything like full comprehension, even after multiple viewings

submit to the flood of images transmitted upon two spherical screens. The film is a fantastical survey of Heligoland (a pair of islands in the North Sea which were long the object of imperial skirmishes before being formally ceded by Britain to Germany in 1890), its contents thoroughly shattered into kaleidoscopic fragments. The footage seems to have been artfully decayed or carefully unearthed. Examination of the main island is interleaved with a bewitching history of Circassian beauties, the mythic native women of the Northern Caucasus, famed for their luminous complexions and in the 19th century the inspiration for a peculiar sideshow in P.T. Barnum's circus. This leads to contemplation of Seers's father, a sailor. A wild-eyed figure stares out from a maritime photograph turned gold with age. The narrator claims that's him, but Seers tells me later that he's hidden among the crew in the rest of the photograph. Lulls and shifts in the film's texture suggest tidal logic at work – the Thames, which rumbles past the gallery, also traces a glittering route through the film. Ghosting through it is footage of a dancer on the rocks at Heligoland shot by Leni Riefenstahl, official film-maker of the Third Reich. All the cryptic associations between the images, Seers told me, come slowly; everything in this film is "spun out of the dance". Its melancholy coda jettisons all this manic energy, sending the audience down into a darkness suggestive all at once of sleep, the womb or the seabed to a haunting lull of ecstatic voices.

Seers unravelled the film for me frame by frame with remarkable lucidity, showing that what sometimes appears to be a stream-of-consciousness flow is in fact meticulously ordered and almost opaque with private meaning. With its associative swoops, sudden drifts and refractions, Seers's work approximates the unaccountable experience of thinking itself: she has abandoned the familiar world of filmmaking in order to capture the wild terrain of the mind. 

new wave films



Winter Sleep

Nuri Bilge Ceylan

This year's Palme d'Or winner from Nuri Bilge Ceylan is an epic dissection of a man and a marriage, set in a hotel carved from the rocks of Cappadocia. Like Ceylan's previous *Once upon a time in Anatolia* it's based on Chekhov stories to produce a multi-layered masterwork from a filmmaker at the very peak of his powers.

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Emma Simmonds, The List

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Reviews



70 Altman

A fundamental misunderstanding of Altman's character has meant that the nearest thing to a Hogarth that American cinema has produced has been whittled down into a garden-variety misanthrope



64 Films of the month



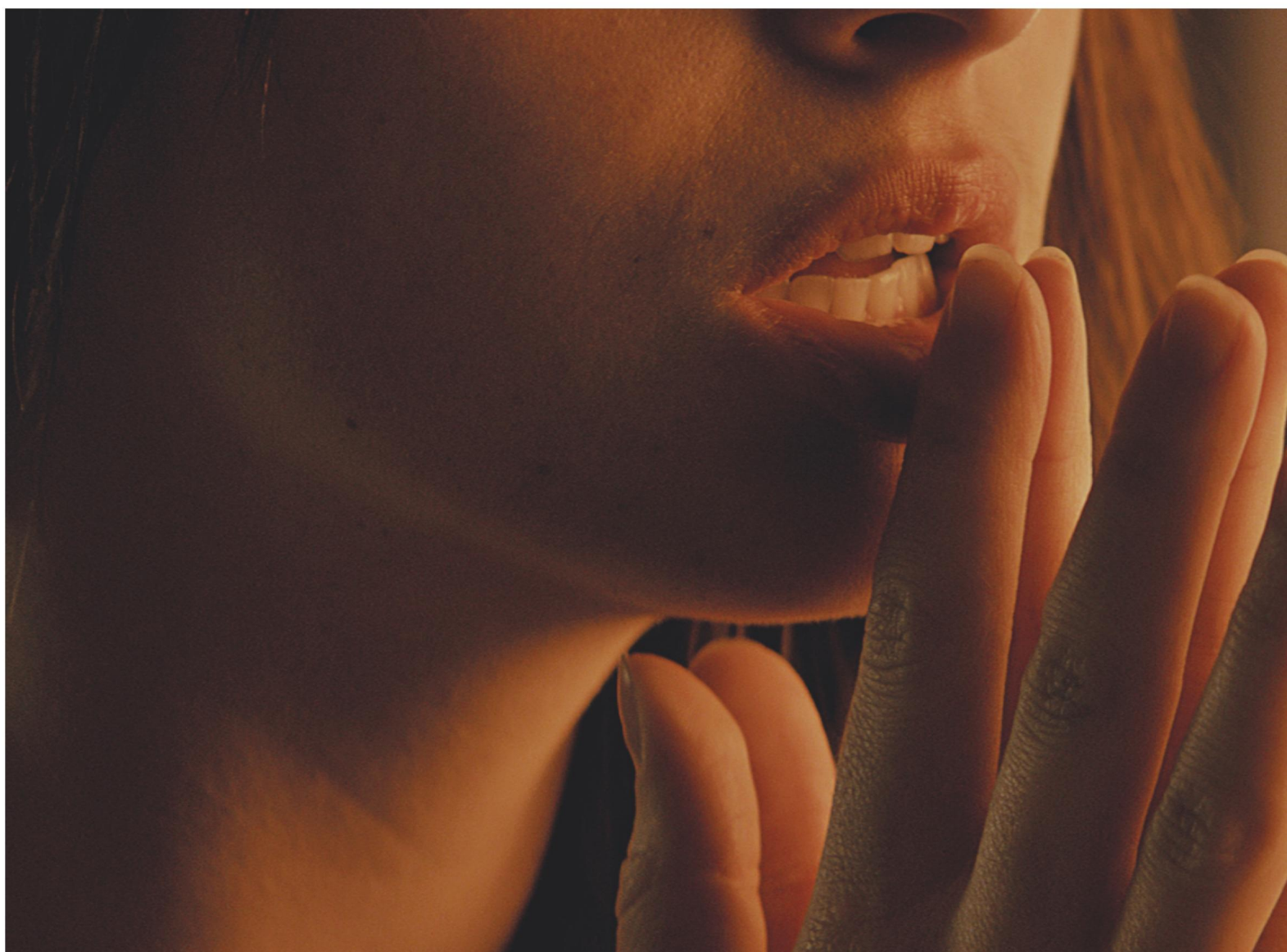
70 Films



96 Home Cinema



106 Books



Tie me up, tie me down: Dakota Johnson is superb in the role of Anastasia Steele, a latterday Tess of the D'Urbervilles, reluctant yet curious and questioning

Fifty Shades of Grey

USA/Japan 2015

Director: Sam Taylor-Johnson

Certificate 18 125m 13s

See numbers
on page 13

Reviewed by Jane Giles

Reading the first reviews of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, I wondered whether female critics had been banned from attending the film's last-minute press

screenings. The male critics had a good old laugh at the film as they vied to write the most disparaging and entertaining review. It was a warning – to their readers, to E.L. James and to the film's director – effectively saying, "Your 'erotica' may be popular but God forbid anyone would take this rubbish seriously. And by the way, we can write better than you can (even if you've made a fortune)." Then came the second wave of responses, from women who wanted to like it or to be shocked but found the film anticlimactic. Where's the sex? Where's the feminist agenda? This isn't BDSM, this is domestic abuse.

In directing this film, Sam Taylor-Johnson held a poisoned chalice. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is not a boundary-pushing female *Shame*, but nor is it the golden turkey that some would wish.

Like the novel, it is a singular phenomenon, an international box-office smash hit by a female British director aimed squarely at a female audience. Like 'Cinderella', 'Bluebeard', *Pygmalion* or *Twilight*, it is a romantic fantasy and a fairytale, a story of sexual awakening in which the innocent heroine's inherent strengths allow her to battle monsters, in this case capitalism and a male sexuality twice warped by childhood abuse and adolescent manipulation. Wicked witches are omnipresent, whether it's Christian's birth mother, the shadowy 'Mrs Robinson' with whom he had a relationship when he was 16, or Ana's mother, on to her fourth husband and having such a great time that she can't make it to her daughter's graduation.

Danny Elfman's score weaves its dark, twinkling magic around the story, bringing out the archetypal fantasy. Towering glass and chrome corporate landscapes replace the dark forests of classic fairytales and much of the film's *mise en scène* brings to mind the great expressive excesses of Douglas Sirk's Hollywood melodramas, lavish women's pictures such as *Written on the Wind* (1956) with its chain of unrequited love. Its palette based around the four elements, Seamus McGarvey's cinematography captures the film's reflective surfaces while introducing shadows and depth. A shot of

Christian and Ana making love pans upwards to reveal a dark mirror on the ceiling, their image like an underwater chimera or *shunga* painting. Storm clouds are always on the horizon, and when it rains it pours. Ana goes up in the air in the helicopter and glider sequences; much derided as examples of the film's silly, stereotypical displays of conspicuous wealth, these scenes are breathtaking and joyous, referencing the title of Erica Jong's milestone novel about female sexuality, *Fear of Flying*. The walls of Christian's office glow red and orange like the fires of hell as he and Ana negotiate the contract by which she will become the submissive to his dominant, and the 'Red Room of Pain' speaks for itself.

It is in one of the film's 'earth scenes', when Ana and Christian walk like babes in the wood, that he tells her the story of his adolescent submission to his mother's friend, 'Mrs Robinson'. The film borrows big from

Some women wanted to like it but found the film anticlimactic. Where's the sex? Where's the feminist agenda? This isn't BDSM, this is domestic abuse



Grimm, and also from *Alice in Wonderland*, the hangover painkillers by Ana's bedside are labelled 'Eat Me', the juice 'Drink Me'. Ana falls down an internet rabbit hole when she begins to research her subject online, looking at Dita Von Teese bondage pictures – a sly reference to the burlesque stripper's real-life urging of women to read erotica by the likes of Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin rather than *Fifty Shades*.

The casting of the film was famously difficult, as *Fifty Shades* fans bayed their disapproval in the background. But Dakota Johnson (daughter of Melanie Griffith and Don Johnson, granddaughter of Tippi Hedren) is terrific as Ana, a latterday Tess of the D'Urbervilles, reluctant yet curious and questioning, rapidly proving herself incompatible with the "so shades of fucked up" control-freak Christian. Johnson brings to mind Charlotte Gainsbourg in *L'Effrontée* (rather than the older nymphomaniac), not least when Christian plays Chopin's 'Prelude Op. 28 No. 4 in E Minor' on the piano, a piece of music sampled by Serge Gainsbourg in his love song for 'Jane B' (Birkin). In the absence of any really explicit sex, the chemistry between the leads strains to be there. Jamie Dornan (*The Fall*) is not the plank that some male critics have described and puts in a decent performance, but he isn't the sexy beast of the *Fifty Shades* reader's imagination, nor does

he beat Jamie Bell's recent turn as a melancholic whip-cracking sadist in *Nymphomaniac*.

One of the disorientating things about the film adaptation is the shift in point of view. Whereas the book begins with Ana looking in the mirror and is told from her point of view, the film's opening scenes are mostly of Christian, setting up his world for Ana to enter. The upside is the loss of Ana's annoying inner voice ("Holy crap!" she exclaims repeatedly in the book) and her inner goddess, an irritating Tinkerbell that most readers long to squash underfoot. But while James's novel luxuriates in Ana's descriptions of Christian, and particularly his erection, the film barely allows the viewer's gaze to linger on the face let alone the body of Dornan's character. This is a far cry from the director's video 'David' commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery in 2004, a single long take of the footballer David Beckham sleeping that allows the viewer to gaze voyeuristically at his beauty. Equally exposing of their subjects are Taylor-Johnson's earlier gallery film *Brontosaurus* (1995), showing a naked man dancing in slow-motion, and her short film *Death Valley* (2006), depicting a man masturbating in the desert.

There have been several films featuring BDSM imagery and/or themes, subliminally in the mainstream (Daniel Craig's James Bond tied naked to a chair and beaten in *Casino Royale*) or explicitly in the arthouse (the films of Alain Robbe-Grillet or Catherine Breillat, *Maitresse*, *Belle*

de Jour, *The Night Porter*, *Mano destra*, *Secretary* and most recently *The Duke of Burgundy*). The closest predecessor of *Fifty Shades* is probably *9½ Weeks* (1986), another sexually driven US mainstream movie phenomenon based on a novel by a woman, and Taylor-Johnson includes a nod to that film's ice cubes and blindfolds. But whereas *9½ Weeks* became famous for a number of set pieces – the food sequence, the male drag scene, the 'You Can Leave Your Hat On' striptease – it's difficult to identify a single watercooler moment or destined-to-be-classic scene in *Fifty Shades*.

Despite the fact that more explicit material, filthier language and dirtier jokes have already been unleashed by 18-certificate studio pictures, Universal was obviously not out to challenge the parameters of mainstream taste or the boundaries of the BBFC and its worldwide equivalents. In the UK at least the film was passed uncut, leaving no hope of seeing a director's version. One suspects that Taylor-Johnson was never free even to push at the edges of sexual representation, and the film's lack of explicit imagery and grit is one of its disappointments. That this has been the predominant articulated response may be apt, because the story is about wanting more: he's gorgeous, wealthy and makes her come, but he doesn't do hearts and flowers and he won't let her sleep with or touch him. The film ends so abruptly that audiences look around in dismay – is that all there is? **S**



Moonlight sonata: glass and chrome corporate landscapes replace the dark forests of fairytales

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michael De Luca
E.L. James
Dana Brunetti
Screenplay
Kelly Marcel
Based on the novel
by E.L. James
**Director of
Photography**
Seamus McGarvey
Edited by

Debra Neil-Fisher
Anne V. Coates
Lisa Gunning
Production Designer
David Wasco
Music
Danny Elfman
**Production
Sound Mixer**
Mark Noda
Costume Designer
Mark Bridges

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**Production
Companies**
Universal Pictures
and Focus Features
present a Michael
De Luca production
presented in
association with
Dentsu Inc./
Fuji Television
Network, Inc.

Executive Producers
Marcus Viscidi
Jeb Brody

Cast
Dakota Johnson
Anastasia Steele
Jamie Dornan
Christian Grey
Jennifer Ehle
Carla May Wilks

Eloise Mumford
Kate
Victor Rasuk
José
Luke Grimes
Elliot Grey
Marcia Gay Harden
Dr Grace
Trevelyan Grey
**Dolby Digital
In Colour**

[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

Seattle, the present. Gauche English literature student Anastasia 'Ana' Steele stumbles into the world of handsome billionaire businessman Christian Grey. He is intrigued by her and she falls for him. He shows her his 'Red Room of Pain', proposing a contractual relationship in which she will become the submissive to his dominant. Ana tells Christian that she's still a virgin. They make love, eventually interrupted by the arrival of his adoptive mother. Christian tells Ana that at 16 he became the submissive to an older woman. He gives Ana a new computer with which to research the world of submission, and they negotiate the contract. Christian meets Ana's stepfather at her graduation, where as

university benefactor he gives a speech; he presents Ana with a new car. Christian takes Ana to his family home for dinner, and is displeased when she says that she is going away to see her mother in Georgia. As Ana sleeps, Christian tells her that his birth mother was a crack addict and prostitute. Christian arrives in Georgia unannounced to take Ana for a spin in a glider before being called back to deal with a work emergency. Ana returns to Christian's apartment to find him agitated; he flogs her in the Red Room. They argue, and he tells her he can't be normal. Ana asks Christian to show her the worst. He thrashes her painfully six times. She tearfully walks away from him, the contract still unsigned.

My Name Is Salt

Switzerland/India/Germany/

The Netherlands 2013

Director: Farida Pacha, Certificate U 91m 55s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

As understated on the level of dialogue and narrative as it is aestheticised in visual terms, this documentary establishes a ravishing photographic record of the working lives of Indian families who relocate annually from their home villages to mine salt in the Little Rann of Kutch, part of the desert territory of Gujarat. Devuben, her husband Sanabhai, their children and relatives are among the 40,000 families who set up temporary home in camps on the salt flats, there to construct pumps to draw the saltwater from the ground, dry the water out in vast pits, trample the salt by foot and finally rake it into heaps for collection. The resulting product is among the highest-quality salt in the world, prized for its purity and whiteness. However, the family's yield is not particularly good this year, and Sanabhai grows increasingly concerned about letting down a demanding merchant. Meanwhile, his younger children play around the site, and attend a makeshift school set up by an NGO for the sons and daughters of the 'salt people'.

Like the filmmaking, the work appears unhurried, undramatic, and graceful despite the graft that underpins it. Indeed, to the great benefit of the film's aesthetic, it seems possessed of a peculiar elegance: the desert setting is desolately lovely and blushing lit by a changeable sky; the trampling of the salt resembles a dance, executed by chains of workers arm in arm. Other details have unexpected beauty, be it in the form of a glimpse of intimacy (a hand massage wordlessly administered, man to man, at the end of a hard day's work) or a harnessing of nature at once practical and thrillingly romantic (communication between camps using flashes of reflected sunlight).

Out of this unusual and stirring material, German cinematographer Lutz Konermann creates a succession of tableaux of often breathtaking prettiness and precision. Though detail about who the family members are as individuals is scant, the interaction shown has warmth and eloquence: meals prepared and consumed in companionable silence, beauty rituals, children playing and learning. The physical demeanour and presentation of the family members also become part of the film's careful visual mode of address: the expressive creases in hands and faces are emphasised, as is the manner in which the salt people costume themselves. It is not only the women, with their earrings and anklets, who have a certain flamboyance; among the men too there is an incongruous and touching showiness, with bright turbans teamed with old but pristine shirts and branded American sportswear. Whether the attention they have paid to their appearance is down to the presence of a film crew, we do not know, but less cosmetic detail is also presented in a manner distinctly pleasing to the outsider's eye. Even the cobbled-together pieces of machinery the labourers use have rustic beauty, and delightful simplicity. The large rakes used to comb the raw salt into heaps, for instance, are built by hand from driftwood, and put directly to use.

Build the tool, use the tool, reap and sell the



Crystal clear: DP Lutz Konermann creates a succession of tableaux of often breathtaking prettiness

produce... For a first-world citizen employed in a non-manual capacity, there is an undeniable pleasure to be found in imagining a way of working that permits such uncomplicated proximity to both the machinery and the fruits of one's labour. Should this be considered a *guilty* pleasure? Is there condescension inherent

in a dreamily romantic portrayal of hard and presumably quite boring physical work, the executors of which are likely little concerned with the shabby-chic appeal of the tools of their trade? While these human subjects are not made preposterous in any way, they are certainly made into objects for the camera's gaze; we don't learn



A world apart: the film doesn't communicate suffering, merely a commitment to getting the job done



their names (until the credit list at the end), how they feel about their work, or anything else about their interior lives or how they live beyond their stint on the salt marshes. Though an element of the film's formal rigour is the stringent maintenance of the fourth wall, at one point, when his family has taken the day off to visit a market, we see Sanabhai's gaze nervously flick to the camera and away again. While it may not be fair to read too much emotion into a passing moment's facial expression, certainly this awkward split second of eye contact emphasises the care with which distance between audience and subjects has been maintained through the rest of the film, and the lack of spontaneity that implies. How real can what we are seeing be, if those before the camera – the children included – are continually striving to ignore it? At one point, the two charming younger children are seen playing a shopping game, involving a little pair of scales on which they weigh the items they are buying and selling. Quite possibly this engaging complement to the film's wider themes of commerce, value and individual endeavour arose organically; but it risks being rather too pretty a fit, indicative of a project in which the human subjects serve as symbols rather than individuals.

Does this sense of constructedness matter if the project, stylised as it is, makes little pretence at being raw or unmediated? Respectful treatment of documentary subjects can be a

It's hard to avoid the sense of a certain power imbalance – the filmmakers invisible, the subjects arranged for voyeuristic perusal

complicated matter. Consider, for example, the accusations levelled at Humphrey Jennings of being condescending in his portrayal of the workers he filmed – “Its principal fault,” said *Documentary News Letter of Spare Time* in 1939, “lies in the patronising attitude which it takes towards the workers (simple child-like folk).” Or the 2004 court case brought by the teacher at the centre of Nicolas Philibert's *Etre et avoir* (2002) in pursuit of a share of that film's profits. In the case of *My Name Is Salt*, it's hard to avoid the sense of a certain power imbalance – the filmmakers so invisible, the subjects so carefully arranged for voyeuristic perusal, the life so poeticised for the viewer's pleasure.

Condescension can cut both ways, however, and quite possibly the most patronising response would be to assume that Sanabhai and his family necessarily lack understanding or appreciation of the project at hand. Which is, after all, hardly a wallow in squalor. One distinctly pleasant and unusual aspect of this film is that what it chiefly communicates is not injustice or suffering so much as a simple commitment to getting a job done in the face of continual small obstacles. Though clearly not wealthy, and despite the odd squabble between Sanabhai and his recalcitrant buyer, the family appear as beautifully content as they are beautifully turned-out. While the press notes for the film and the onscreen text that closes it seem keen to emphasise the hardships the family endure, the atmosphere conveyed is rather more merry and calm than pained or stoic. “Their exploitation is a shocking one,” states director Farida Pacha in the press kit; but if this is indeed the case, it doesn't really come across on screen. Sanabhai's buyer is faceless, the wider commercial destinations of the product unspecified and the family's financial position unclear – is this a portrait of exploitation, or simply one of work? What is clearly and confidently communicated is the visual aspect of a way of life whose strange beauty would fit a magic-realist novel, as lived by a family whose real feelings about it remain shrouded in their own mystique. And although the film offers no specific information about where and how this particular salt is marketed and used, it does remind its viewers that complex human stories lie behind the comestibles they take most for granted. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Lutz Konermann
Farida Pacha
Written by
Farida Pacha
Cinematography
Lutz Konermann
Editing
Katharina Fiedler
Music

Marcel Vlad
Location Sound
Sanjeev Gupta
Ramesh Birajdar

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Leafbird Films
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Mumbai, René Da Rold
Supported by the

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Bertha Fund
Post-production
funded by
Schweizerische
Eidgenossenschaft,
Eidgenossisches

Departement des
Innern EDI/Swiss
Confederation,
Department of
Home Affairs
éducation21 Filme
für eine Welt

Dolby Digital
In Colour

[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Filmhouse

A documentary filmed in Gujarat, India. A truck laden with people approaches a makeshift desert camp and drops off its passengers, who set about making the camp habitable. Married couple Sanabhai and Devuben and their children and relatives establish the home they will occupy for eight months while mining and harvesting salt. They erect pumping equipment and prepare the beds in which the salt water will dry. Sanabhai leaves an offering of coconut and incense, and prays. The smaller children play and attend school while the rest of the family begin work, pumping out the water, filling the pits and sifting and treading the salt. The process falls behind schedule as the salt fails

to crystallise, and Sanabhai expresses his concerns to an impatient buyer. They begin to rake the salt, the last stage in the process, but the results are not as hoped. On a day off, the family visits a local market. The salt harvested and bagged, Sanabhai's buyer is dissatisfied and declines to pay for it; Sanabhai is sanguine, expressing the hope that he will get a better yield the following year. The family pack up their equipment and camp, preparing to leave. Onscreen text explains that the coming monsoon will wash away the remains of the settlement, and that the family, among some 40,000 others, will return and begin work all over again the following year.



Young at heart: Ben Stiller and Naomi Watts play Josh and Cornelia, a married couple striving to recapture their youth

While We're Young

USA 2014

Director: Noah Baumbach

Certificate 15 96m 59s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

As if to underline the *plus ça change* of his theme, Noah Baumbach kicks off *While We're Young* with an onscreen text dating from 1892: a snatch of dialogue from Ibsen's late drama *The Master Builder*. It's an exchange between Solness, the architect of the title, an eminent man in his sixties, and the seductive Hilde Wangel, a woman in her twenties who invades, disrupts and eventually destroys his life. "I've become so disturbed by younger people," Solness admits. "They upset me so much that I've closed my doors." "Maybe you should open the door and let them in," Hilde retorts. (The plot of the play secretes personal relevance: three years earlier the 61-year-old Ibsen had become infatuated with an 18-year-old Viennese woman called Emilie Bardach.) Solness ends up tumbling to his death from the phallic tower he's built; nothing quite so catastrophic befalls Baumbach's protagonist, documentary-maker Josh Srebnick (Ben Stiller), but the humiliating *dégringolade* still lies in wait.

There's a classic Thurber cartoon from the *New Yorker* showing a despondent family – mother, father, two kids and droop-jowled Thurberesque

dog. The mother is saying tetchily to her little daughter, "Well, I'm Disenchanted, Too. We're *All* Disenchanted." That could sum up the prevailing climate of virtually all Baumbach's output: most of his characters start off disenchanted, and most of those who don't get there soon enough. Maybe it's traceable to his upbringing. His breakthrough feature *The Squid and the Whale* (2005) pitilessly dissected the divorce of a highbrow Brooklyn couple, seen mainly through the eyes of their confused, distressed teenage sons – and was by all accounts largely autobiographical. He followed up with *Margot at the Wedding* (2007), again constructed around a fractured family – but this time one so viciously dysfunctional as to make the *Squid*'s clan look like the Waltons.

Since then we've had *Greenberg* (2010), with Stiller as a socially phobic New Yorker relocating to Los Angeles – which he despises – after his musical career goes belly up, house-sitting for his more successful brother and filling his time by writing abusive letters to the likes of Starbucks. "Youth is wasted on the young," his friend Ivan (Rhys Ifans) observes as they study menus in a restaurant, to which Greenberg replies, "Life is wasted on – people." If *Greenberg* ends up on a note of guarded optimism it's largely through the arrival in the hero's life of Florence, a much younger woman played by Greta Gerwig (making her breakout from mumblecore). Foreshadowings of the present movie in this relationship, then, and especially in a farcical scene in which

Greenberg finds himself easily the oldest guest, by a couple of decades, at a drug-addled party. Gerwig (by now Baumbach's partner and co-writer) got her own title role in the bittersweet *Frances Ha* (2012), playing a naive, disaster-prone misfit in New York trying to realise her hopelessly unfocused aspirations and slipping from just-about survival to borderline destitution.

So *While We're Young* could be taken, from one angle, as Baumbach's sardonic side glance at his own involvement with the rather younger Gerwig and her contemporaries; from another, it could qualify as a distant remake of Joseph L. Mankiewicz's classic theatrical bitchfest *All About Eve* (1950). Eve, in Mankiewicz's film the wide-eyed young actress who insinuates herself into the entourage of Broadway *grande dame* Margo Channing (Bette Davis) in order to usurp her position, is in this case represented by Jamie (Adam Driver), an ambitious young documentary-maker. Like Eve, he deploys blatant flattery to gain Josh's attention: showing up with his wife Darby (Amanda Seyfried) at one of the older man's lectures, he professes huge admiration for one of his earlier efforts ("Hey, that scene with the dogs round the garbage, how did you stage that?"). He further captivates Josh's interest by claiming to have the film on a VHS tape.

As here, much of the film's humour is mined from its satirising of Jamie and Darby's retro-hipster lifestyle. Josh is enchanted by what he sees as their youthful openness and fervour –



Most richly farcical of all is an ayahuasca party where the guests get high on the Peruvian hallucinogen to the strains of Vangelis while a shaman exhorts them to 'breathe in truth'

"I like how engaged they are," he tells his sceptical wife Cornelia (Naomi Watts), "so in the moment" – but almost equally delighted by the objects and artefacts they surround themselves with: the VHS tapes, the hi-fi turntable and shelves packed with vinyl LPs, the manual typewriter, the pet chicken in a cage. They also have an even younger flatmate, Tipper (Dree Hemingway), who never says much but wanders through the apartment wearing little but panties and T-shirts bearing sardonic slogans ("Some college I didn't go to").

All this seems to Josh and eventually (with some reservations) to Cornelia, scanning their iPads or flipping through Hulu, like a way of connecting with their own pre-disenchantment younger selves, before they got bogged down in their present mode of social and career stasis. Josh has been toiling for years on a sprawling political film, which his father-in-law Leslie (Charles Grodin), a widely respected documentarist of the older generation, tells him is "a six-and-a-half-hour film that's about seven hours too long". What we see of the footage, consisting mainly of a dry elderly professor rambling straight to camera, often while eating his lunch, seems to bear out Leslie's verdict. To bring in some income, Cornelia acts as her father's assistant, evidently without much enthusiasm. The couple feel besieged by friends of their own age, especially new parents Marina (Maria Dizzia) and Fletcher (Beastie Boy Adam Horovitz), who keep urging them to have kids. To Jamie Josh confesses that, "wistful and disdainful were the only two feelings I had left".

Most of the film's funniest moments stem from Josh and Cornelia's flailing attempts to recapture their youth. Jamie invites Josh (whom he addresses as 'Yossi' or 'Jossel') to a beach street party, persuading him to wear a hat and buy a bicycle – which inevitably gets stolen, leaving just a sad solitary wheel locked to a street lamp. Cornelia, fleeing a smug mums-and-babies event that Marina has taken her to, attends a hip-hop dance class with Darby, picking up some convulsive moves which she then tries to teach to Josh. Most richly farcical of all is an ayahuasca party where the guests get high on the sludgy Peruvian hallucinogen to the strains of Vangelis while a shaman exhorts them to "breathe in truth – breathe out ignorance" and most of those present vomit thunderously into thoughtfully provided brass vessels. It's at this event that Cornelia kisses Jamie, but nothing much comes of it; one of

the film's strengths is that an all-too-expected recoupling of the four leads never happens.

Only towards the end does *While We're Young* start to lose traction. The revelation of the exact nature of Jamie's duplicity feels a touch over-contrived, though everyone's relaxed indifference to Josh's outraged denunciations is diverting. Leslie, supposedly the epitome of old-fashioned documentary integrity, remains blandly untroubled, while even Cornelia comments, "I think [Jamie's] an asshole but the movie's pretty good." And despite occasional hints that parenthood isn't quite the all-fulfilling panacea it's touted as – Fletcher confides to Josh "I love our baby but I'm still the most important person in my life" – the film's epilogue, 'One year later', seems to suggest that a newborn infant and a Caribbean excursion can solve most discontents. Whether this signals a softening of Baumbach's previously acerbic worldview remains to be seen; though initial reactions to his next film, *Mistress America*, again starring Gerwig, already completed and premiered at Sundance, suggests that a certain screwball kookiness may indeed be starting to dilute the erstwhile acid. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Scott Rudin
Noah Baumbach
Lila Yacoub
Eli Bush

Written by

Noah Baumbach

Director of

Photography

Sam Levy

Edited by

Jennifer Lame

Production

Designer

Adam Stockhausen

Original Music

James Murphy

Sound Mixer

Christopher Gebert

Costume Designer

Ann Roth

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Films, LLC

Production

Companies

IACF presents a Noah

Baumbach picture

Filmed with the

support of the

New York State

Governor's Office

for Motion Picture

& Television

Development

Film Extracts

Symbiopsychot-

axiplasm (1968)

Experiment on 114th

Street (1964)

Cast

Ben Stiller

Josh Srebnick

Naomi Watts

Cornelia Srebnick

Adam Driver

Jamie

Amanda Seyfried

Darby

Charles Grodin

Leslie Breitbart

Adam Horovitz

Fletcher

Maria Dizzia

Marina

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Icon Film

Distribution

Present-day New York. Josh and Cornelia Srebnick are a married couple in their forties, both involved in documentary-making. Josh's early work showed promise but he's been working on a long political film for the past eight years without great success. Cornelia works with her father Leslie, a respected documentarist of the old school. Josh and Cornelia don't have children, and feel pressured by their contemporaries who are parents, especially their friends Marina and Fletcher. While giving a lecture, Josh meets a couple in their twenties, Jamie and Darby. Jamie expresses admiration for Josh's early films, and Josh is drawn to the youngsters' hipster lifestyle. He starts socialising with them, though Cornelia has her doubts.

Josh volunteers to collaborate on Jamie's current project, which involves contacting former school friends on Facebook. He's amazed to discover that Kent, Jamie's first contact, is a decorated but traumatised Afghanistan veteran; Jamie, delighted, changes the whole plan for his film. Josh and Cornelia spend more and more time with the younger couple, adopting their habits and becoming alienated from their old friends. By chance, Josh discovers that Jamie's film project was a set-up; Darby has known Kent for years, and Jamie has been using Josh and Cornelia as a way to get close to Leslie, whose support he needs to obtain funding. At a tribute to Leslie at the Lincoln Center, Josh denounces Jamie as a fraud – but no one, not even Leslie, takes much notice. Josh and Cornelia, abashed, resolve to act their age.

A year later. Josh and Cornelia have a newborn baby and are off to Port-au-Prince.



Master and pupil: Adam Driver plays a young documentary-maker who befriends Ben Stiller's Josh

Altman

Canada/USA 2014
Director: Ron Mann

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Pauline Kael was Robert Altman's loudest champion, but rereading her exhortations about *The Long Goodbye* (1973) and *Nashville* (1975), her appreciation seems like a mixed blessing. "When Altman – who is the most atmospheric of directors – discusses what his movies are about, he makes them sound stupid," she writes in her review of the latter film, but in both cases one finds the critic impressing her own condescension – towards the detective novel, towards country-and-western music and towards the audiences for both – on to the movies being discussed, a condescension the works themselves don't evince. This has led to a fundamental misunderstanding of Altman's character, and so the nearest thing to a Hogarth that American cinema has produced has been whittled down into a garden-variety misanthrope.

This new documentary goes some way towards ameliorating that view, through the testimony of Altman himself. Responding to a question about the nature of his satirical Americana, Altman replies: "I love this country, it's all I know, it's my culture." Ron Mann, the documentary's director and a long-time filmmaker, has assembled a great cache of select archival material here, apparently with the full connivance of the Altman estate – Kathryn Reed, Altman's wife from 1959 until his death in 2006, provides much of the film's narration. There are home movies – including Altman parading bare-assed at a party in Paris in the 1980s – set visits and seldom-seen excerpts from playful early shorts and television work, such as the episode of *Combat!* featuring a shell-shocked Vic Morrow that put the director at loggerheads with Hollywood higher-ups not for the last time.

Altman offers a chronologically arranged survey of its subject's career, never varying from the accepted narrative – struggle, breakthrough,



American Hogarth: Shelley Duval, Robert Altman

struggle, comeback, struggle, comeback – in a way that might offend any of Altman's surviving family, respectful of his accomplishments while stopping short of fawning. The resulting film is an ideal primer for the neophyte, though loaded with enough rarities to keep a viewer familiar with the body of work interested. The subject's *bon vivant* personality is considered only in passing, which is as it should be, for we've had quite enough of the *Easy Riders*, *Raging Bulls* obsession with all things scurrilous about the New American Cinema. Indeed, Mann's film is rather single-mindedly devoted to the working life of its subject, to the extent that it omits his boyhood in Kansas City. (That Altman was raised Catholic and educated by Jesuits, neither exactly typical in the Midwest, is never mentioned.)

Original material includes appearances from a succession of former collaborators who briefly offer their definitions of 'Altmanesque'. For Julianne Moore, it's "how vulnerable we are"; for James Caan, it's "making your own rules". And it needs to be said that *Altman*, a documentary overview of a subject who was famously averse to the tenets of the well-made film, is nothing more nor less than a well-made film. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ron Mann

Written by

Len Blum

Director of

Photography

Simon Ennis

Editor

Robert Kennedy

Art Direction

Craig Small

Matthew Badiali

Music Score

Guido Luciani

Phil Dwyer

Sound Designer

John Laing

©Sphinx Productions

Production

Companies

Epix, The Movie

Network and

Movie Central

present a Sphinx

Productions film

Produced in

association with

Epix, Ontario Media

Development

Corporation, Rogers

Cable Network

Fund, Rogers

Documentary Fund,

The Movie Network,

Movie Central

With the participation

of Canada Media

Fund and with

the assistance of

Canadian Film or

Video Production

Tax Credit

Film Extracts

Bodyguard (1948)

How to Run a Filling

Station (1953 – short)

The Delinquents

(1956)

Million Dollar

Mermaid (1952)

The Party (1966 –

unreleased short)

Countdown (1968)

Pot au feu (1965 –

unreleased short)

MASH (1969)

Toral! Toral!

Toral! (1970)

Patton (1970)

McCabe & Mrs.

Miller (1971)

The Long Goodbye

(1973)

California Split (1974)

Nashville (1975)

A Wedding (1978)

Secret Honor (1984)

The Player (1992)

Short Cuts (1993)

Prêt-à-porter (1994)

Gosford Park (2001)

A Prairie Home

Companion (2006)

Brief Encounter

(1945)

Appearances

by

Michael Murphy

Robert Altman

Sally Kellerman

James Caan

Elliott Gould

Keith Carradine

Lily Tomlin

Robin Williams

Philip Baker Hall

Bruce Willis

Julianne Moore

Lyle Lovett

Paul Thomas

Anderson

Kathryn Reed

Altman

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Soda Pictures

A documentary examining the career of filmmaker Robert Altman.

Having served with a bomber squadron in the Pacific Theatre, Kansas City native Altman returns to the US after WWII and attempts to make a career for himself in Hollywood. After initial failure, he returns to his hometown and starts making industrial films for the Calvin Company. He directs 'The Delinquents' (1957), which catches the eye of Alfred Hitchcock and leads to work in television, where he excels – and where he meets future wife Kathryn Reed. Increasingly at odds with TV producers, Altman finally breaks through into feature films, and has his

first hit with 1970's 'MASH'. He has a run of critical successes, and forms his own independent production company, Lion's Gate. However, a string of box-office failures follows, capped by the disastrous reception of his big-budget musical 'Popeye' in 1980. Altman then directs works for the stage and television, including the HBO semi-documentary 'Tanner '88'. His marketability reconfirmed, he begins to direct features again, including 'The Player' (1992) and 'Short Cuts' (1993), until heart trouble slows his productivity. Restored by a full heart transplant, Altman returns to work in the late 90s and continues to make films until his death from cancer in 2006.

BAFTA Shorts 2015

United Kingdom 2014
Directors: various
Certificate 15 122m 51s

Reviewed by Dylan Cave

The short film would appear to be currently thriving in the UK. With dedicated festivals reporting annual submissions of more than 1500 new films, solid training and funding streams and a vast online presence, the promised democracy of filmmaking brought about by the digital revolution seems to be well and truly with us. And yet short films still rarely reach a cinema audience beyond a festival environment, so this 2015 package of Bafta short-film award nominees should again be welcomed. In fact this year's selection may be the most satisfying so far, the five live-action dramas and three animations exuding a style and confidence that bode well for the state of emerging UK talent.

A prime example is Oscar Sharp's *The Kármán Line*, in which Olivia Colman plays Sarah, a mother who suddenly finds herself floating involuntarily in the air, causing distress among her already damaged family. Sharp's film begins as gentle observational comedy but soon morphs into absurdist tragedy as Sarah faces the bleak inevitability of her gradual rise to the heavens. By the end, the film has become a surprisingly original and resonant depiction of long-term terminal illness. *The Kármán Line*, like most of the films here, has an admirably firm grasp on what it wants to say and how to do so most effectively.

In *Three Brothers*, Hamid (Zain Muhammad Zafar) is a teenager who is grieving for his recently deceased mother and forced to look after his younger siblings when their dad absconds to Pakistan. Hamid's hobby, raising newly hatched chickens, may provide symbolic imagery that is perhaps too literal for some tastes, but director Aleem Khan's handling of this true story is otherwise assured and heartfelt.

Chickens also appear in *Boogaloo and Graham*, the live-action award winner about two young brothers who resist their parents' demand to have their feathered pets killed. The film gains much from a confident young cast, who bring a 1970s Belfast family to life with wit and joy.

Compilation opener *Emotional Fusebox* also benefits from well-pitched interplay between its cast of familiar UK faces. Jodie Whittaker in particular gives a nuanced performance as Anna, a kooky sister mourning her dead twin. The film's script could be accused of losing subtlety towards the end, but it's a minor quibble. In fact, of all the live dramas, only *Slap* reveals any notable weaknesses. It's an undergraduate project from the National Film and Television School, about the disastrous coming-out of Conner, a cross-



Up and away: Olivia Colman

dressing teenage boxer. The film is so efficiently constructed in its opening section that the second half struggles to hold the tension convincingly. Instead we're thrown into a seemingly never-ending series of violent confrontations faced by Conner. The film is redeemed by a terrific lead performance from Joe Cole, and appears to be shot on 16mm, the sparkle and dirt that occasionally pass through the gate lending the film a bygone student-like authenticity.

Similar appreciation of analogue over digital appears in the animations. *My Dad* is a hand-drawn short from the RCA that uses oil pastels

and paper to animate the mixed emotions of a boy reminiscing about his loving but deeply racist father. And *Monkey Love Experiments*, made by previous Bafta winners Will Anderson and Ainslie Henderson, continues their fascination with old analogue formats, this time capturing the confused actions of their animated monkey as if on old U-matic tape. Only *The Bigger Picture* openly embraces the modern, using lifesize characters painted on walls to animate its tale of middle-class family turmoil. Ambitious, with a perfect fusion of form, theme and digital craft, it won the animation award. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Emotional Fusebox

United Kingdom 2014

Director
Rachel Tunnard
Producer
Michael Berliner
Writer
Rachel Tunnard
Director of Photography
Bet Rourich
Editor
Rachel Tunnard
Production Designer
James Lapsley
Music
Aaron Beckum

©Rachel Tunnard and Creative England
Production Companies
Creative England and BFI present a Pico Pictures production
Made with the support of Creative England through the BFI Net.Work
Executive Producer
for Creative England:
Paul Ashton

Cast
Jodie Whittaker
Anna
Lorraine Ashbourne
Marion
Marcia Warren
Jean
Edward Hogg
Adam
Rachael Deering
Fiona

[2.35:1]

My Dad
United Kingdom 2014

Directed by
Marcus Armitage
Animation
Marcus Armitage
Diana Gradinaru
Jonathan Long
Noriko Ishibe

©Royal College of Art
Production

Companies
Supported by the Nat Cohen Scholarship

voice
Divian Ladwa

[1.78:1]

Slap
United Kingdom 2014

Directed by
Nick Rowland
Produced by
Michaelangelo Fano
Written by
Islay Bell-Webb
Nick Rowland
Cinematographer
Sverre Sordal
Editor
Mark Hammill
Production Designer
Laura McKiewicz

©National Film and Television School
Production Company
The National Film and Television School presents

Cast
Joe Cole
Conner
Elliott Tittensor
Archie
Skye Lourie
Lola
Stephen Bent
Conner's father
Lucia Young
Nina

Dolby Digital
[2.35:1]

Three Brothers
United Kingdom 2014

Directed by
Aleem Khan
Produced by
Matthieu de Braconier
Stephanie Paepow
Written by
Aleem Khan
Director of Photography

Craig Dean Devine
Editor
Alice Petit
Production Designer
Paulina Rzeszowska

©The Bureau
Production Companies
Film London presents in association with Spidervision Productions a the Bureau Film Company production
Funded and supported by Film London via the BFI NETWORK and with support from Creative Skillset

Cast
Zain Muhammad
Zafar
Hamid
Yousuf Hussain
Humza
Muhammad
Mujahid-Ali Shahzad
Billy
Kulvinder Ghir
dad
Kate Russell-Smith
teacher
Sona Vyas
mum

[1.78:1]

The Bigger Picture
United Kingdom 2014

Directed by
Daisy Jacobs
Producer
Chris Hees
Written by
Daisy Jacobs
Director of Photography
Max Williams
Production Design
Elo Soode
Music
Huw Bunford
Animated by
Daisy Jacobs

©National Film and Television School

Production Company
The National Film and Television School presents

Voice Cast
Alistair Simpson
Richard
Christopher Nightingale
Nick
Anne Cunningham
mother
Jan Moran Neil
Olive
Marco Radice
doctor

Dolby Digital
[1.78:1]

The Kármán Line
United Kingdom 2014

Directed by
Oscar Sharp
Produced by
Tiernan Hanby
Campbell Beaton
Max McGill
Phil Barnes
Written by
Dawn King
Story
Oscar Sharp
Cinematography
Robbie Ryan
Editors
Claudia Wass
Alex Berry
Ellie Johnson
Production Designer
Jerry Bland
Composer
Bjarni Biering
Margeirsson

©The British Film Institute, Virgin Media and Fortune Films Limited
Production Companies
BFI and Virgin Media present a Fortune Films production
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund

Cast
Olivia Colman
Sarah
Shaun Dooley
Dave
Chelsea Corfield
Carly
David Cann
Dr Behring
Julia Watson
Dr Benham
Sarah McVicar
Sue

[1.78:1]

Monkey Love Experiments
United Kingdom 2014

Directed by
Ainslie Henderson
Will Anderson
Produced by
Cameron Fraser
Written by
Ainslie Henderson
Will Anderson
Director of Photography
Ruan Seuss
Editor
Neil Jack
Composer
Atzi

©Hopscoth Films Ltd and DigiCult Ltd
Production Company
Creative Scotland presents
Executive Producers
for Hopscoth Films:
Carolynne Sinclair Kidd
for DigiCult:
Paul Welsh
for Creative Scotland:
Ross McKenzie

Voice Cast
Tobias Feltus
psychologist
Oliver Henderson
astronaut
Bill Andrew Quinn
voiceover

[1.78:1]

Boogaloo and Graham
United Kingdom 2014

Directed by
Michael Lennox
Produced by
Brian J. Falconer
Written by
Ronan Blaney
Director of Photography
Mark Garrett
Editor
Livia Serpa
Production Designer
Niall McEvoy
Music
Jered Sorkin

Production Companies
Made with the support of Northern Ireland Screen via the BFI NETWORK
Executive Producer
Produced by
Richard Irwin

Cast
Martin McCann
father
Charlene McKenna
mother
Riley Hamilton
Jamesy
Aaron Lynch
Malachy

[2.35:1]

In Colour
(except *Monkey Love Experiments*: in Black and White)

Distributor
Independent Cinema Office

Blind

Norway/The Netherlands/Sweden 2013
Director: Eskil Vogt

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

"It's not important what's real, as long as I can visualise it," the newly blind Ingrid (Ellen Dorrit Petersen) tells herself, sitting high up in her Oslo tower block and trying to remember the visual world she's lost – or is progressively losing. But it soon becomes evident that what she's picturing is increasingly detached from reality, as she starts creating in her head alternative versions of herself and her husband Morten (Henrik Rafaelsen) in an attempt to control her own fears and imaginings about the unseen world.

Blind is the first feature as director from Eskil Vogt, who scripted Joachim Trier's *Oslo, August 31st* (2011). Trier's film (adapted from the same pre-war French novel as Louis Malle's 1963 *The Fire Within*) shares with this one a sense of disaffection, of characters isolated and unable to connect. But Ingrid through her loss of sight is yet more cut off, incapable of establishing, or re-establishing, a mutual relationship even with her husband, whom she suspects of infidelity and of covertly watching her when he has supposedly left their apartment.

Echoes here of Tony Richardson's *Laughter in the Dark* (1969) and Jocelyn Moorhouse's *Proof* (1991), both of which explored the theme of blindness-induced paranoia. Vogt's humour, though, is less cruel, at times even playful. Among the devices Ingrid uses to help with her condition is an electronic wand that speaks the colour of anything it touches. At one point she pulls down Morten's trousers and runs the gizmo over his bottom; it announces "baby pink". Indeed, any cruelty suffered by Ingrid seems to be largely self-inflicted, the fictional workings of her own anxious mind. As surrogates for herself and Morten she creates Elin and Einar, inflicting her own blindness on Elin and making Einar a cruder, more ungainly version of her husband.

At least, that's one reading, since *Blind* retains a hint of ambiguity throughout. Certain events are at first sight presented as real: Morten and Einar meet up, and are apparently old friends from their schooldays. But then Vogt nudges us into doubting this is 'really' happening: while the two men talk, the venue changes around them, from a café to a bus to a



Unseen forces: Ellen Dorrit Petersen

A compilation of eight films nominated for 2015 Bafta awards in either the British Short Film or British Short Animation categories.

In 'Emotional Fusebox', introverted Anna is nagged by her mother to chat to a young man whose car has broken down. 'My Dad' is an animation about a young boy's struggle to understand his caring but racist father. 'Slap' tells the story of a tough boxer who comes out to his friends as a cross-dresser. London drama 'Three Brothers' looks at how teenager Hamid struggles to care for his younger siblings when their feckless

father disappears to Pakistan. Animation 'The Bigger Picture' traces the breakdown between arguing siblings when their dying mother enters her final weeks. In 'The Kármán Line', a family collapses when the mother contracts an odd condition that makes her levitate in the air. The animated 'Monkey Love Experiments' follows the last moments of a laboratory monkey that has been trained into wrongly thinking it will fly to the moon. The compilation ends with 'Boogaloo and Graham', about two boys in 1970s Belfast who resist family pressure to get rid of their chickens.

subway train, without any break in the conversation, as if a screenwriter were redrafting the scene. And when we first meet Elin she has a ten-year-old son called Kim, who rapidly changes into a daughter with the same name.

The effect of all this, diverting though it is, tends to lessen the film's emotional impact, since everything that seems to threaten Ingrid is reduced to the contrivances of her imagination working overtime. But even with this reservation, *Blind* creates a strikingly detached mood, abetted by Henk Hofstede's delicately sensuous score and the cinematography of Thimios Bakatakis, who, taking his cue from Ingrid's near-albino appearance, drapes a pale wash over many of the scenes, as if seen through misted glass. Glass indeed figures a lot; in one of the film's most affecting moments, Ingrid strips naked and presses herself against the window of her high-rise apartment – desperate at least to be seen even if she can't see. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Hans-Jørgen Osnes
Sigve Endresen

Screenplay

Eskil Vogt
The character of
Ingrid is inspired
by the novel

Forestillingen by
Terje Høltet Larsen

Director of

Photography

Thimios Bakatakis

Editor

Jens Christian
Fodstad

Production

Designer
Jørgen Stangebye

Larsen

Composer

Henk Hofstede

Sound Design

and Mix
Gisle Tveit

Costume Designer

Ellen Dæhli Ystehede

@Motlys,

Lemming Film

Production

Companies

Motlys presents in
co-production with
Lemming Film

A film by Eskil Vogt

Funded by Norsk

Filminstitutt,

Netherlands

Film Fund, Norsk

Filmdistribution,

Storyline Studios, C

More, NRK, Motlys,

Don't Look Now,

Lemming Film

Film Extracts

Mask (1985)

Cast

Ellen Dorrit

Petersen

Ingrid

Henrik Rafaelsen

Morten

Vera Vitali

Elin

Marius

Kolbenstvedt

Einar

Stella Kvam Young

Kim (girl)

Isak Nikolai Møller

Kim (boy)

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Axiom Films

International Limited

Present-day Oslo. Ingrid, an author in her thirties, has recently gone blind and is reluctant to leave her apartment. She fears that her memories of the world around her are fading, and believes that her husband Morten, an architect, doesn't always leave the apartment when he seems to, but sits secretly watching her. She also suspects that he has an online lover. She imagines a story about this woman, a Swedish divorcee called Elin, who has a ten-year-old daughter called Kim.

Elin is being spied on by her slobbish neighbour Einar, who likes to watch porn. Einar is an old friend of Morten's, though they've lost touch; they meet up and discuss a film they've seen. Sitting in a café, Elin is suddenly struck blind. While having sex with Morten she tells him that her blindness was caused by a chunk of ice falling on her. Einar comes into Elin's apartment unknown to her; later he meets her in the lobby of her building and chats her up. Morten takes her to a party to celebrate the completion of a project his firm has been working on. She wears a new dress but it transforms into a wholly inappropriate and revealing one. Elin turns into Ingrid at the party; other partygoers point and laugh at her. The party venue becomes a disused building, with Elin/Ingrid still being mocked and even more exposed.

Having confronted her worst nightmares, Ingrid regains confidence and feels ready to face the outside world.

The Boy Next Door

USA 2014

Director: Rob Cohen

Certificate 15 90m 36s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

The most absurd moment in *The Boy Next Door* comes when strapping 19-year-old sociopath Noah (Ryan Guzman) presents his prospective fortysomething lover Claire (Jennifer Lopez) with a 'first edition' of *The Iliad*: one wonders if he bought it at a garage sale circa 850 BC. Pretty much every other scene in Rob Cohen's palpably cheap and atrociously crafted erotic thriller gamely competes for second place, with Lopez sleepwalking through the sort of single-mom-in-peril role she played more than a decade ago in *Enough*. (Guzman, who is playing a character ten years younger than he is, tries his best to look smouldering while violently wielding a socket wrench.)

Plot holes and patchy editing aside, this movie about a sexually potent middle-aged woman who is publicly humiliated and repeatedly almost murdered for daring to have a fling with her sexy underage neighbour is fairly offensive, retrograde stuff. But then this isn't the sort of movie that even gets made if anybody at any level of the production stops to think. **S**



Toy boy story: Jennifer Lopez, Ryan Guzman

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jason Blum
John Jacobs

Elaine Goldsmith-

Thomas

Benry Medina

Jennifer Lopez

Written by

Barbara Curry

Director of

Photography

David McFarland

Edited by

Michel Aller

Production Design

Charles Varga

Music

Randy Edelman

Nathan Barr

Production

Sound Mixer

Willie D. Burton

Costume Design

Courtney Hoffman

@Universal Pictures

Production

Companies

Universal Pictures

presents a

Blumhouse/Smart

Entertainment/

Nuyorican

production

A film Rob Cohen

Executive

Producers

Couper Samuelson

Jeanette

Volturmo-Brill

Zac Unterman

Cast

Jennifer Lopez

Claire Peterson

Ryan Guzman

Noah Sandborn

John Corbett

Garrett Peterson

Ian Nelson

Kevin Peterson

Kristin Chenoweth

Vicky Lansing

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

California, the present. While going through divorce proceedings with her philandering husband Garrett, high-school teacher Claire strikes up a friendship with Noah, the 19-year-old nephew of her elderly neighbour. One weekend, while Claire's moody son Kevin is away on a fishing trip with his father, she sleeps with Noah. When she expresses regret the next morning, Noah becomes aggressive and jealous. He enrolls in her class at school and hangs explicit photographs in her classroom. He murders her best friend and abducts Kevin and Garrett, planning to kill them as well. During a struggle, Claire injects Noah in the eye with Kevin's medication and drops a heavy metal object on his head, killing him.

Cinderella

USA/United Kingdom 2014

Director: Kenneth Branagh

Reviewed by Anna Smith

"Where there is kindness, there is goodness; and where there is goodness, there is magic," breathes Ella's dying mother (Hayley Atwell) in the early scenes of this live-action fairytale. This simple, unerringly positive spirit runs throughout Chris Weitz's script: the message is that virtue will eventually be rewarded, and the outcome is never in doubt. This is wish-fulfilment fantasy on a grand scale.

"Based on Disney's Cinderella properties and the fairytale written by Charles Perrault", Kenneth Branagh's film is an old-fashioned story with an equally old-fashioned heroine. Ella (Lily James) is no feisty modern princess of the *Frozen* variety. She's generous and principled but mostly meek: a sheltered bleeding heart who's easily manipulated by her bitter stepmother (a magnificent Cate Blanchett). While many a contemporary narrative may urge young women to fight for their rights, Ella must sit tight and wait for her fairy godmother (an amusing Helena Bonham Carter) to facilitate her rescue by the prince (Richard Madden).

A few concessions have been made to modernity and plausibility. Ella now meets the prince as a stranger in the woods before the ball, thus establishing their compatibility while on neutral ground. The connection between them is based on shared values as well as physical attraction – a quick verbal exchange deftly sets out their similar moral outlook. Ella's sunny, non-judgemental disposition quickly endears her to the prince, who's more accustomed to fawning courtiers and pretentious sophisticates like Ella's stepmother. And Ella is dressed simply when they meet, rather than catching the prince's eye in a show-stopping ball gown.

But, true to the fairytale, Ella races out of the palace at midnight, before the spell can break and reveal her to be a commoner, thus undermining the notion that she's happy to be accepted at face value. As a source text, 'Cinderella' offers contradictory messages: kindness and humility are promoted as valuable characteristics, yet an expensive dress and a showy carriage are also necessities. As for the bravery that Ella's mother attempts to instil in her, it is absent when it comes to the stroke of midnight.

Nonetheless, *Cinderella* is a pleasure to watch. The unashamedly romantic, intensely emotional tone is carried through all departments: Sandy



Out of the past: Lily James

The Dark Horse

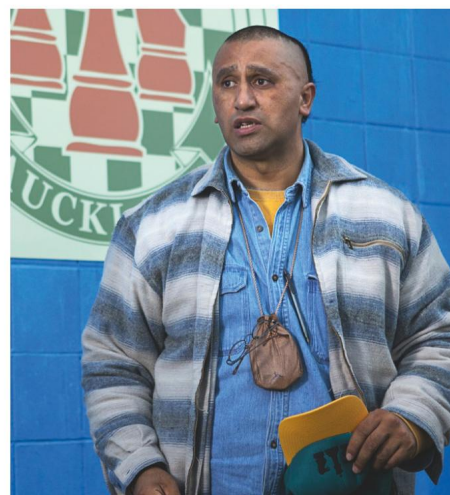
New Zealand/Canada 2014
Director: James Napier Robertson

Reviewed by Michael Pattison

While it might be tempting to dismiss the marketing ploys burdening *The Dark Horse* with ostensibly superficial claims that it's a cross between *Once Were Warriors* (1994) and *Shine* (1996), such references aren't entirely cynical. Put another way, when a film as winning and solidly made as New Zealander James Napier Robertson's arrives, you find an audience by any method you can – and if that means suggesting Australasia's cinematic history is thin (or that the rest of the world is deficient in its knowledge of it), then so be it.

There are other reasons why *The Dark Horse* sits comfortably between these two unlikely comparators. Napier Robertson's second feature, following 2009's *I'm Not Harry Jensen*, is by turns a poignant and hard-edged look at the life of Genesis 'Gen' Potini (Cliff Curtis), the Maori speed chess champion who died of a heart attack, aged 46, in 2011. Known for his idiosyncratic, energetic playing style, Potini was something of a local hero for his outreach efforts in teaching chess to children and young adults from working-class and/or vulnerable backgrounds. He also suffered from bipolar disorder, and spent much of his life in and out of hospitals being treated for it.

The Dark Horse – following Jim Marbrook's 2003 documentary on the same subject – begins with Gen being released from hospital into the custody of his only kin: older brother Ariki (Wayne Hapi), the patriarch of a fiercely tribal biker gang named the Vagrants. It's with Vagrants member Mutt (Barry Te Hira) that Gen clashes most – except that clash is the wrong word here, implying as it does a mutual taste for violence and confrontation. For while Mutt's a one-eyed, leather-clad, beer-swigging pit bull, Gen's considerable size is counterbalanced by an outwardly gentle demeanour. Haunted by the hallucinations that set in whenever he doesn't take his medication, Gen is all too aware of his doubly precarious predicament: he must deal not only with his



All the bright moves: Cliff Curtis

own infirmities but also with the brutally unforgiving world inhabited by his brother – and, more pressingly, by the latter's teenage son Mana (James Rolleston), who is suffering an abusive initiation process into the Vagrants.

While Gen's arc is that of the classic pacifist hero, everything is magnified and displaced by his concern for young Mana, who reveals in one standout scene, by the local hilltop monument where Gen has come to sleep rough, that Mutt and the Vagrants have been urinating on him. In many ways, films such as this live or die by their performances – ask *Shine*'s director Scott Hicks – and to this end, Rolleston is heartbreaking as a lad whose survival instincts tell him to cling on to the one person who might get him out of a predictably miserable future. As the boy's saviour, though, Curtis is the film's obvious and undeniable engine: a bruised warrior whose toothless smile and backward cap are seemingly as crucial to character as his persistent faith in youths facing saddeningly familiar prospects. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Simon Kinberg
Allison Shearmur
David Barron
Screenplay
Chris Weitz
Based on Disney's
Cinderella
properties and the
fairytale written by
Charles Perrault
Director of
Photography
Haris Zambarloukos

Film Editor

Martin Walsh

Production

Designer

Dante Ferretti

Music

Patrick Doyle

Sound Mixer

Stuart Wilson

Costume Designer

Sandy Powell

Visual Effects

MPC

Rodeo Visual

Effects Company

©Disney

Enterprises, Inc.

Production

Companies

Disney presents an
Allison Shearmur/
Beaglepug/Kinberg
Genre production
A Kenneth
Branagh film
Quebec Production
Services Tax Credit
Executive Producer
Tim Lewis

Cast

Cate Blanchett

Stepmother

Lily James

Cinderella

Richard Madden

Prince

Stellan Skarsgård

Grand Duke

Holly Grainger

Anastasia

Sophie McShera

Drisella

Derek Jacobi

King

Helena Bonham

Carter

Fairy Godmother

Nonso Anozie

captain

Ben Chaplin

Ella's father

Hayley Atwell

Ella's mother

Richard McCabe

baron

Dolby Digital

In Colour

Prints by

FotoKem

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Buena Vista

International (UK)

In a fairytale kingdom, little Ella lives happily with her mother and father in the country. When her mother becomes ill, she tells Ella to have courage and be kind. After his wife's death, Ella's father remarries widow Lady Tremaine, who moves into their home with her daughters Anastasia and Drizella.

Ella's father falls ill and dies while away on business. Her step-family begin to treat her like a servant, nicknaming her 'Cinderella'. While riding in the country, Ella meets and falls for a young man calling himself Kit, an apprentice at the palace. Ella fails to reveal her name. Kit is in fact the eligible prince of the kingdom. Vowing to find the girl he met, he throws a ball inviting all the local young women. Lady Tremaine forbids Ella to attend but her Fairy Godmother appears, transforming her mother's old dress into a ball gown and magically changing a pumpkin into a carriage to take her to the ball. Ella dances with the prince, who takes her to be a princess. But Ella flees before the spell breaks at midnight, leaving behind one of her glass slippers. The prince vows to marry whomever the slipper fits. Lady Tremaine locks Ella in the attic when the prince's staff arrive with the slipper, but her singing alerts the men. The prince reveals his presence among the staff and places the slipper on Ella's foot; it fits. They marry.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Tom Hern

Written by

James Napier

Robertson

Inspired by Jim

Marbrook's

documentary *Dark*

Horse [2003]

Cinematography

Denson Baker

Editing by

Peter Roberts

Production Design

Carter

Kim Sinclair

Score

Dana Lund

Sound

Chris Todd

Nick Buckton

Fred Holmner

Tim Chaproniere

Pete Smith

Costume Design

Kristin Seth

©Four Knights

Film/Genesis

Picture Limited

Production

Companies

Four Knights Film and

Seville International

in association with

the New Zealand

Film Commission,

NZOnAir, Southern

Light Film and Arama

Pictures presents

A James Napier

Robertson film

A Tom Hern

production

Financed in

association with

Fulcrum Media

Finance

Executive Producers

Tim White

Cliff Curtis

Cast

Cliff Curtis

Genesis Potini, 'Gen'

James Rolleston

Mana

Kirk Torrance

Noble

Xavier Horan

Jedi

Miriama McDowell

Sandy

Baz Te Hira

Mutt

Wayne Hapi

Ariki

Lyel Timu

Rangimarie

Te Ahorangi

Retimana-Martin

Rusty

Calae Hignett-

Morgan

Piripi

Te Rua Rehu Martin

Murray

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Koch Media

Gisborne, New Zealand, the early 2000s. Former Maori speed-chess champion and bipolar sufferer Genesis Potini is released from hospital and taken in by his brother Ariki, leader of a violent motorcycle gang named the Vagrants. Genesis meets Ariki's teenage son Mana, and clashes with Vagrants member Mutt when defending the boy against bullying. With help from an old friend, Genesis resolves to take a local chess club to a national tournament in Auckland. When Ariki finds out that Mana has been following Genesis to the chess club, he kicks his brother out and makes him promise not to impede Mana's upcoming initiation into the Vagrants.

Homeless, Genesis wakes up one morning to find Mana with him. Mana wants to join the chess club.

When Genesis rejects him, Mana reveals that the Vagrants have been urinating on him as part of his initiation. Genesis lets Mana join the chess club. When the tournament is set to coincide with Mana's initiation ceremony, Genesis visits Ariki to tell him that Mana is entering the chess tournament instead. One of Genesis's students wins the tournament, but celebrations are cut short when Ariki appears and punches Genesis before taking Mana away. That night, Genesis goes to Ariki's home and stands up to his brother and Mutt. Finally allowing his son to be taken under Genesis's wing, Ariki also consents to Mutt's ritualistic beating. Genesis drives away with Mana, telling him that everything is going to be all right.

Difret

Ethiopia/USA 2013
Director: Zeresenay Berhane Mehari
Certificate 12A 99m 15s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Based on a real legal case, earnestly committed to the promotion of a still-ongoing social ill and only the fourth ever 35mm feature to be made in Ethiopia, *Difret* has much to recommend it as a well-meant and significant undertaking. In artistic terms, however, it lacks grace and subtlety, and struggles with its dual ambition to encompass the complexities of real events and translate them into a heroic, Hollywood-style idiom. Still, sterling performances and an unpredictable plotline sustain the attention until the bittersweet end.

The word '*difret*' has a double meaning in Amharic, which could have done with an onscreen explanation: it conveys courage and daring, but also alludes to the act of rape. The victim is Hirut (Tizita Hagere), a 14-year-old schoolgirl who is abducted by a gang, one of whom is bent on making her his wife. According to local tradition he is permitted to achieve his aim by force, though this is far from acceptable to more modern and progressive elements of Ethiopian society, embodied here by lawyer Meaza Ashenafi (Meron Getnet). When she steps in to defend Hirut, she takes on two systems bent on discrediting the female victim: the traditional tribal justice system, which is male-only and respects the custom of abducting women in order to marry them; and the official legal structures, which are no less male-dominated and hardly less inclined to protect the status quo.

In its initial stages the film presents its forces of dark and light in such unambiguous terms that it feels flat as drama, though the indignant delineation of a clear and painful injustice is undoubtedly stirring. The narrative gathers sophistication as ambiguities emerge: the head-on collision of an educated elite with a community wedded to its brutal 'customs'; the need of Meaza's not-for-profit organisation to walk a tightrope of effecting incremental change while accepting the odd outrage in the



The accused: Tizita Hagere

interests of keeping its institutional backers on-side. A couple of powerful scenes illustrate these dilemmas, though they're followed by a storyline that neglects plot momentum and fails to prioritise its own strongest elements.

Always reliable, however, are the two lead performances. Getnet as Meaza is a tough, complex, touching heroine, whose vulnerabilities are present without being dwelt on or 'cured' by male intervention (a flirtation with a stunningly handsome legal contact is hinted at, but not followed up). Hagere, meanwhile, evokes with precocious sensitivity the trauma, shame and isolation of a rape victim, and the tenacious self-respect of a girl not cowed by a bureaucracy that fully expects to crush her with ease. *Difret* isn't quite thoughtful enough to follow up on its deeper themes, nor disciplined enough to fulfil its mainstream ambitions; but it has drive and heart. And although, like many a film based on someone's lived experience, it has elicited a degree of controversy in terms of how it has treated its real-life subject, both its performers and its source story merit attention and respect. **S**

Dior and I

France 2014
Director: Frédéric Tcheng
Certificate 12A 89m 49s

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Since haute couture has to remain impossibly expensive in order to function, it's important to pretend that the whole thing is terribly, terribly important. Frédéric Tcheng's documentary about Dior's artistic director Raf Simons colludes in this mythology; it wants desperately to divert us from any idea that fashion might be ridiculous. While it purports to reveal the nuts and bolts beneath fashion's frills, it still insists that the fairytale is true: Simons is an artist; the world awaits his vision; he works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.

The jeopardy our hero faces is the rapidly approaching deadline for his first collection. He has just eight weeks to produce it, from concept to catwalk, and on one level the film is a mesmeric testament to the sheer amount of work and effort that goes into this process – most of it done by other people. Simons was parachuted into Dior in 2012, much to the surprise of many insiders, since he was known primarily for minimalist menswear, while Dior had traditionally majored in voluminous fantasy concoctions. Simons is not one of the gigantic eccentrics of fashion; even when he has a tantrum about some clothes arriving a bit late, it's more of a petulant snit than an operatic outburst. Perhaps, though, this was a deliberate recruitment strategy: while there's no mention in the film of John Galiano, who was sacked by Dior the year before, after being caught on video disgorging a scandalous anti-Semitic tirade, he still casts an unhelpful shadow. The monkish Simons helps to signal Dior's fresh start.

His big idea is to pay homage to the foundational vision of Christian Dior himself, and this gives Tcheng a neat structure for the film, which makes careful use of archive footage

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Frédéric Tcheng	Ha-Yang Kim	Chiara Girardi
Written by Frédéric Tcheng	Sound Virgile van Ginneken	voice reading memoirs
Based on Mr Dior's memoirs <i>Christian Dior & Moi</i>	Production Companies CIM Productions presents a film by Frédéric Tcheng	Omar Berrada
Cinematography Gilles Piquard	Executive Producers Guillaume de Roquemaurel	In Colour [1.78:1] Subtitles
Editors Julio C. Perez IV Frédéric Tcheng	Original Music Juliette Lambours	Distributor Dogwoof

Combining observational, fly-on-the-wall footage with interviews and archive material, the documentary follows Raf Simons during an eight-week period in 2012, from his appointment as artistic director of Parisian fashion house Dior to the presentation of his first collection. Tension builds as the deadline approaches, but the workforce pull together to realise Simons's vision, which is an updated homage to the New Look collection that made Dior's name in 1947. Dior's autobiography '*Dior et moi*' is employed as a voiceover, drawing parallels between the two designers, while archive footage from 1947 is intercut with analogous present-day scenes. Simons is seen creating mood boards, liaising with the seamstresses in the atelier and demanding exacting standards from all concerned. As the show approaches, he is increasingly anxious – not because he doubts his collection but because he hates to be in the public eye. On the day, however, he fulfils his role with aplomb and the collection is hailed as a success.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Mehret Mandefro Leela Demoz Zeresenay Berhane Mehari	Jessica Rankin Lacey Schwartz	Aster
Written by Zeresenay Berhane Mehari	Cast Meron Getnet Meaza Ashenafi Tizita Hagere Hirut Assefa	In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Director of Photography Monika Lenczewska	Shetaye Abreha Etaferaw Teshager	Distributor Soda Pictures
Edited by Agnieszka Głinska	Mekonen Leake Mr Assefa Bekele	
Production Designer Dawit Shawel	Meaza Tekle Mrs Mulu Assefa	
Music David Schommer David Eggar	Mickey Tesfaye Officer Getachew	
Production Sound Mixer Laurence G. Smith	Brook Shiferaw assistant DA	
Costume Designer Helina Desalegn	Moges w/ Yohannes village police captain	
	Teferi Alemu village judge	
	Haregewine Assefa Membere Yohannes	
	Dirbwork Seifu Mrs Belaynesh	
	Getachew Debalke Mr Hiruy	
	Yohannes Beay Alemu	
	Rahel Teshome Mrs Elfinesh	
	Kal Teshome	
©Haile-Addis Pictures Production Companies Haile-Addis Pictures in association with Truth Aid Media presents Executive Producers Francesca Zampì Julie Mehretu		

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1996. Meaza, a lawyer, provides free legal counsel to women through her non-profit organisation Andinet. In a village not far from the city, schoolgirl Hirut is abducted by a gang, taken prisoner and raped. She flees, stealing a gun; when her rapist catches up with her, she shoots him dead. Before the rest of the gang can kill her, police intervene and arrest her for murder. Meaza hears of the case and offers to represent Hirut. Her efforts are obstructed by a hostile assistant DA, but an old employer who is a powerful lawyer assists her in getting the girl released on bail. The local elders decide meanwhile that Hirut must be banished from her village and that her father must pay a compensatory sum to the dead man's family, who insist he only acted according to tradition in kidnapping his intended bride. Meaza finds Hirut a place at an Addis Ababa orphanage. Meaza is granted a three-month extension to seek witnesses for Hirut's case, but the Ministry of Justice refuses to overturn Hirut's exile. Meaza sues the Ministry of Justice, which responds by suspending Andinet's licence to practise law. Meaza's business partner quits in anger at Meaza's impulsive behaviour and obsession with the case. The justice minister is fired, Andinet's licence is restored and Hirut's court case is finally heard. She is acquitted. Meaza takes her back to Addis Ababa; at the girl's request, she drops her on the street and leaves her to make her own way.

Elle l'adore

France 2014
Director: Jeanne Herry
Certificate 15 104m 22s

Reviewed by Sue Harris

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The title of this film is taken from the song 'La Goupie du pianiste' ('The Pianist's Goupie'), a huge chart hit in France in 1980 for singer Michel Berger. The song recounts the experience of a devoted fan in love with a selfish musician; naively willing to sacrifice her own life for his happiness, she would take any risk, goes the refrain, would even follow him to hell, because "*elle l'adore*" (she adores him).

While the crazy fan is a familiar trope of the psychological thriller – *Play Misty for Me* (1971) and *Misery* (1990) come to mind – it's a particularly fertile topic for a first film by Jeanne Herry, the daughter of actress Miou-Miou and Julien Clerc, one of France's most beloved popular singers. Herry smartly resists any temptation to wallow in the musical world of variety crooners or depict the excesses of the celebrity good life, and focuses her attention instead on the co-dependent relationship of two dysfunctional and deeply narcissistic characters.

Muriel (Sandrine Kiberlain) is a middle-aged teenager, her home decorated floor to ceiling with album covers, concert-ticket stubs, signed photographs and memorabilia from a 20-year obsession with Vincent Lacroix (Laurent Lafitte), a perennially youthful star who is adored by mums and celebrity gossip magazines alike, and whose comeback has been announced on a cheesy afternoon talk show. When Lacroix's girlfriend dies in the course of a violent argument – hit on the head by an award trophy that he later cynically donates to a charity auction – his career is suddenly in jeopardy and the only person he dares to trust is the loyal Muriel, his number-one fan. But while Muriel's loyalty is second to none, she quickly turns out to be a pathological liar, whose fundamental unreliability will thwart all Lacroix's attempts to manage the situation.

The film plays on the tension between Muriel's charm as a natural storyteller, her latent madness and Lacroix's underestimation of a woman whose vulnerability he knowingly



Fan's labyrinth: Laurent Lafitte

exploits. While her entourage are fond of the immature attention-seeker in their midst, the viewer shares Lacroix's dawning horror that by trusting her he has opened himself up to a greater danger than a mere career setback. She is an unreliable narrator, who permanently veers between half-truth and outright fiction, and whose evolving account of the events around the disposal of the girlfriend's corpse can never be fully trusted. When the singer decides his only option is to frame Muriel, she retaliates in the only way she knows how: by being a persuasive liar in the interrogation room. In a tour de force of Keyser Sozë-like inventiveness, riffing on the information being fed to her by her police interrogators, she succeeds in saving her own skin as well as his. Does this 'real' drama finally cure her of her mythomania? Who knows? She certainly gets rid of all the memorabilia and is able to walk past her former idol in the street. Lacroix, however, reduced to following her as she resumes her ordinary dull life, now knows exactly what overwhelming obsession feels like. 📺



Behind the seams: Dior and I

from the 1940s to suggest parallels between Simons's designs and Dior's New Look. Tchong also uses a voiceover from Dior's autobiography *Christian Dior et moi* – in which the designer tussles with his dual identity as a private man and a celebrity couturier – to gloss over Simons's reticence about being in the public eye. Unfortunately, this apparent shyness has the great disadvantage of making Simons rather emotionally unavailable as a documentary subject; instead, it's Pieter Mulier, his assistant and fixer, who has all the charisma and people skills. But the most compelling characters are the two *premières* who run the atelier, Florence Chehet and Monique Bailly: middle-aged women who, as Mulier says without overstatement, "are the two most important people in the house".

Simons, though knowledgeable about art, is not a pencil man himself; he never sketches his designs, instead producing mood boards of ideas, which the atelier then translates into workable prototypes. One suspects that the atelier would be perfectly capable of producing a collection without any input at all from Simons; the reverse is certainly not the case.

In 1947, the original New Look was all about re-establishing the class hierarchies that had been flattened by World War II: by using yards of expensive and still-rationed fabric, it was designed to draw a stark line between the haves and the have-nots. Haute couture still depends on this line, and that is reflected in the relative status of the male designers and the seamstresses. There are exceptions, though. When Simons gets angry that one of his *premières* has been sent to New York to work her magic on a tricky fitting, he is reminded firmly of his place. The client in question spends a six-figure sum on Dior couture *every season*; underneath the artistic hogwash and the gossamer mythology, there's an armature of hard cash. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Sophie Tepper
Alain Attal
Hugo Sélignac
Screenplay/
Dialogue
Jeanne Herry
with the collaboration
of Gaëlle Macé
Director of
Photography
Axel Cosnefroy
Editing

Francis Vesin
Art Director
Johann George
Original Music
Pascal Sangle
Sound
Antoine Deflandre
Eric Lesachet
Vincent Mauduit
Olivier Ranquet
Steven Ghouti
Costume Designer
Emmanuelle

Youchnovski
©Les Productions Du
Trésor, Chi-Fou-Mi
Productions,
Studiocanal, TF1
Films Production,
Égérie Productions
co-production
with the participation
of Canal+, Ciné+, TF1
in association
with Indéfim 2
and Cofinova 10
Production
Companies
Les Productions du
Trésor and Chi-Fou-Mi
Productions present

a Les Productions Du
Trésor, Chi-Fou-Mi
Productions,
Studiocanal, TF1
Films Production,
Égérie Productions
co-production
with the participation
of Canal+, Ciné+, TF1
in association
with Indéfim 2
and Cofinova 10
Executive Producer

Xavier Amblard
Cast
Sandrine Kiberlain
Muriel Bayen
Laurent Lafitte
Vincent Lacroix
Pascal Demolon
Antoine
Olivia Côte
Coline
Michel Drucker

himself
Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles
Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

France, present day. Beautician Muriel sees her children off at a railway station and heads to a concert given by her idol, singer Vincent Lacroix. Sometime later, she is astonished when Lacroix turns up at her door asking for a favour. He reveals that he has accidentally killed his girlfriend Julie following a violent argument. He confides in Muriel, and requests her help in disposing of the body, which is now wrapped up in the boot of his car. Muriel is instructed to drive overnight to Switzerland and deliver the body to Vincent's sister, who will incinerate it at a local pet crematorium. Vincent will then inform the police that Julie has disappeared.

Muriel accepts and leaves with the body, but when Vincent speaks to his sister, hoping for confirmation that everything has been taken care of, it becomes clear that Muriel has not taken the body to the agreed destination. With a police investigation under way, Vincent is horrified to find himself linked to Muriel, and takes steps to frame her for the murder. The police are suspicious of the pair, who are both clearly lying to them, but are unable to get to the truth of the matter. Vincent realises that he has been outmanoeuvred by Muriel, and becomes fixated on her. Muriel in turn finds that she is over her extreme obsession with the star.

The Face of an Angel

United Kingdom/Italy/Spain/USA 2014

Director: Michael Winterbottom

Certificate 15 101m 25s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

"You can't tell the truth unless it's a fiction," announces a journalist to our film-director hero Thomas, right at the start of Michael Winterbottom's ambitious, unwieldy drama about the creative agonies of dramatising a notorious Italian murder case. Since this case very closely resembles the real-life killing of British student Meredith Kercher in Perugia in 2007, the warning hints at a heady stream of lurid revelations to come. Yet here both Elizabeth the victim and Jessica the accused are largely silent, indistinct figures floating through the film's margins, pretty blanks on to whom the media project what they want to see.

Winterbottom, who has form with 'ripped from the headlines' work with *Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997) and *In This World* (2002), is far more interested in taking a caustic, sideways look at the media circus determining how the case plays out. When thin-skinned director Thomas (Daniel Brühl, sour with distaste throughout) is interrogating an international hack pack brandishing competing theories and prurient clickbait 'exclusives', the film is at its toothy, questioning best.

Unfortunately, having decided that "there's no such thing as truth or justice – just a popularity contest", the film then settles itself around a cocaine-dazed, unhappily divorced Thomas painfully birthing a script that aims to transcend a vulgar whodunnit. Sniffily disdainful of the London film executives suspicious of Thomas's auteurist agonies, screenwriter Paul Viragh's narrative quickly becomes as self-absorbed as the mass media it's seeking to skewer. What tips it over the edge, however, is that both fictional script and actual narrative lumpily incorporate Dante's *The Divine Comedy* as a structuring principle. So Thomas finds himself, in the middle of his journey, in a welter of dark dream sequences; these attempt to weld the murder themes (stabblings, crime-scene visits, a lurid sex-and-death tableau) to infernal Dantean imagery (including the eruption of a six-footed CGI serpent) and the results are as patchy as they are pretentious.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Melissa Parmenter
Written by
Paul Viragh
Director of Photography
Hubert Taczanowski
Editor
Marc Richardson
Production Designer
Carly Reddin
Music
Harry Escott

Sound Recordists
Giacomo Avanza
Matteo Olivari
Will Whale
Costume Designer
Daniela Ciano

©Angel Face Films
Limited / British
Broadcasting
Corporation
Production Companies

BBC Films and
Multitrade/Ypsilon
Films presents in
association with
LipSync LLP and
Vedette Finance
LLC a Revolution
Films production
A Michael
Winterbottom film
Produced with
the support of
Regione Toscana

With the support
of the MEDIA
Programme of the
European Union
Developed by
BBC Films
Executive Producers
Christine Langan
Ed Wethered
Eric Anidjar
Leon Bennarroch
Roberto Mitrani

Norman Merry
Anthony Jabre
Reza Safinia
Susana Hornil

Cast
Daniel Brühl
Thomas Lang
Kate Beckinsale
Simone Ford
Valerio Mastandrea
Eduardo

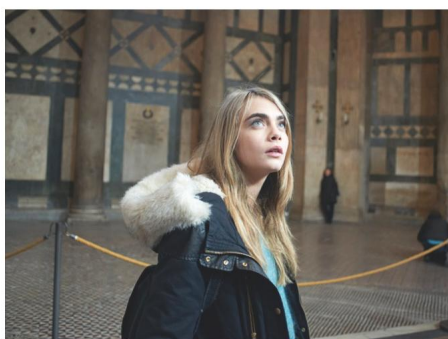
Cara Delevingne
Melanie

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Siena, Italy, 2011. Film director Thomas joins the international press pack reporting the appeal process of a US student and her Italian boyfriend convicted of murdering an English student, Elizabeth. Journalist Simone guides him through the case's backstory and the press hysteria it generated. Commissioned to produce a true-crime thriller about the case, Thomas decides that the truth of the murder is unknowable. He plans instead to make a film about the media circus, using the structure of Dante's 'The Divine Comedy'. Obsessed by the case and experiencing paranoid hallucinations from cocaine use, Thomas becomes convinced that local blogger Eduardo is hiding key facts. He sleeps

with Simone, but alienates her by insisting that she is trivialising the case. English student Melanie befriends him. Writing his script, Thomas is preoccupied by Elizabeth, who seems to have been forgotten by the media. He is plagued by violent fantasies, and dreams that he has stolen the murder weapon from Eduardo's flat. He is briefly arrested after violently confronting Eduardo. At the courthouse, both the accused are acquitted. Thomas takes Melanie to Ravenna and Dante's tomb. Thomas's London producer tells him that the film has been cancelled following the acquittal. Watching Melanie, Thomas concludes his script with Elizabeth's happiness during her time in Siena.



True crime: Cara Delevingne

Yet among the classical allusions and high-minded discussions of the meaning of violent death, nagging true-crime thriller questions keep surfacing, like the return of the repressed. Thomas's obsession with creepy local blogger Edoardo, who may be concealing both the truth and the murder weapon, is repeatedly invoked – presumably to provide a vulgar but necessary modicum of tension and jeopardy. Nonetheless, nothing leads anywhere, except back to Thomas and his artistic suffering. A sudden flurry of tenderness for Elizabeth's lost life, symbolised by free-spirited student Melanie (an engagingly natural Cara Delevingne), seems too little and too late. But it brings into poignant focus the victim, who – like Meredith Kercher – has been obscured by the gossipy furore of the murder investigation. With its whirl of competing themes and undigested big ideas expounded in self-conscious dialogue and brittle performances, *The Face of an Angel* feels rather rushed together. Dark, handheld visuals only serve to over-egg it, as does Harry Escott's ethereal score. If Winterbottom, a fearless genre-bender all the way from *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005) to *The Killer Inside Me* (2010), was attempting an intellectual interrogation of true-crime cinema, he's managed a hurried tangle here, rather than a patient unpacking. As *The Divine Comedy* tells us: "Haste denies all acts their dignity." ☹

Fairytale Story of Seven Dwarves

Germany 2014, Directors: Harald Siepermann, Boris Aljinovic, Certificate PG 87m 21s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

This jaunty but derivative German animation melds together several fairy stories and a clutch of fairytale characters in pseudo-*Shrek* style, but suffers from a rambling plot and lack of focus. Tricked out with a handful of largely forgettable songs celebrating friendship, the episodic narrative takes an effortfully wacky and circuitous route (via a flirty Snow White, rapping walrus mermen and a tap-dancing dragon) through its larky reworking of the Sleeping Beauty story. Unable to decide whether Jack the kitchen boy or loveably dopey dwarf Bobo is its true hero, the film leaves the lion's share of the playful, slapstick action to the dwarf crew.

Directors Boris Aljinovic and Harald Siepermann give the film's stylised animation a toy-box feel and import some *Frozen*-ish frost effects and rampaging ice monsters to update the classic fairytale material. If the CGI visuals lack the super-high finish and sweeping imagination encountered in, say, *Big Hero 6*, the film's cosy traditional style and plethora of pratfalls will appeal to small children. ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Douglas Welbat
Screenplay
Harald Siepermann
Daniel Welbat
Douglas Welbat
Based on characters created by Otto Waalkes, Bernd Eilert
Colour/Light
Luis Guggenberger
Robert Schlunze
Music
Daniel Welbat
Stephan Gade
Sound Design/Mix
Ralph Thiekötter
Thekla Demelius
Dimitrios Posukidis
Animation Director
Jan Stoltz

©7 Dwarves
Animation Company
GmbH & Co. KG,
Cinemendo GmbH,
Erftal Film- und
Fernseherproduktion
GmbH & Co. KG, CC
Medienproduktions
und Verwaltungen
GmbH, TransWaal
Film GmbH &
Co. KG., VIP
Medienfonds 2
GmbH & Co. KG,
VIP Medienfonds
4B GmbH & Co.
KG, Rialto Film
GmbH, MMC
Independent GmbH,
Universal Pictures

Production GmbH
Production Companies
A film by Harald
Siepermann
A 7 Dwarves
Animation Company
production in
co-production with
CinEmendo GmbH,
Erftal Film- und
Fernseherproduktion
GmbH & Co. KG, CC
Medienproduktions-
und Verwaltungen
GmbH, TransWaal
Film GmbH &
Co. KG., Film &
Entertainment VIP
Medienfonds 2
GmbH & Co. KG, Film
& Entertainment
VIP Medienfonds
4B GmbH & Co.
KG, Rialto Film
GmbH, MMC
Independent GmbH,
Universal Pictures
Production GmbH
In co-operation with
Animationsfabrik
GmbH, Trixter Film
GmbH, scopas
medien AG, Ambient
Entertainment
GmbH & Co. KG,
Virgin Lands GmbH,
3D Boutique AG
Funded by FFA,
HessenInvestFilm,
FFSH, FFFB,
nordmedia, DFFF

Executive Producers
Jurgen Draabe
Jorn Holm
Linh Lu
Harro Von Have
Philipp Weck
Jorn Radel
Marcus Schoefer
Christian
Arnold-Beutel

Voice Cast
Joshua Graham
Bobo
Nina Hagen
Dellamorta
Daniel Welbat
Burner, dragon
Dov Gray
Herman, merman
Christa Clahane
Princess Rose
James Frantowski
Jack, kitchen boy
Lindsay Goodtimes
Snow White

Dolby Digital In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Signature
Entertainment

German
theatrical title
Der 7te Zwerg

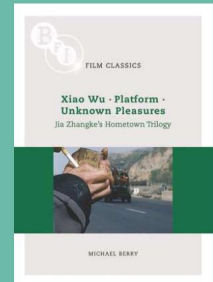
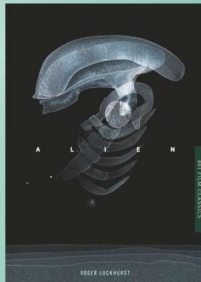
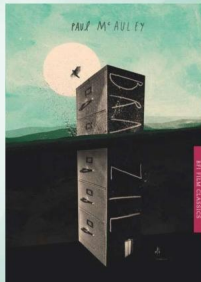
The land of Fantabularasa, once upon a time. Sorceress Dellamorta imprisons kitchen boy Jack, secret love of Princess Rose. At Rose's birthday ball, Dellamorta puts the castle and guests to sleep. The Seven Dwarves seek Jack at Dellamorta's faraway lair. Burney her dragon is lonely, but dwarf Bobo befriends him. Burney flies Jack and the dwarves back to the castle. Dellamorta bewitches Jack but Bobo breaks the spell. Dellamorta creates ice monsters, which are defeated by Burney. Dellamorta drinks an invincibility potion but is foiled when Bobo uses a mirror to deflect her deadly magic back at her. Jack's kiss wakens Rose; they marry.



BFI Film Classics

Directors' Cuts

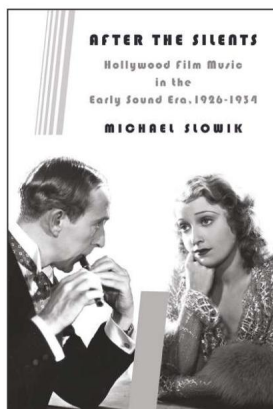
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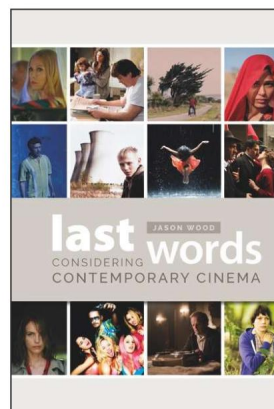
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*expires 31/07/2015



"Slowik not only sketches out the important trends and developments of this nascent period of classical film music history but also makes a compelling argument that there are important continuities that connect the mature silent period with the early sound period."

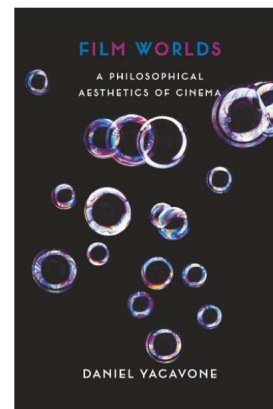
— Jeff Smith, author of *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*



"[Wood's] remarkable assemblage of filmmakers who comprise his cast of characters represent just about every point along the spectrum of serious screen art today."

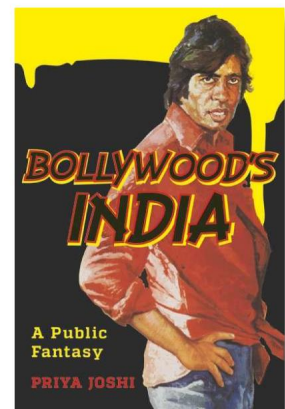
— David Sterritt, chair, National Society of Film Critics

Wallflower Press, an imprint of Columbia University Press



"A major reconsideration of the nature of aesthetic experience through the medium of cinema . . . a significant revision of our understanding of modern and contemporary film theory from Mitry and Metz to Bordwell and Deleuze. This brilliant and original work will be of interest to philosophers and film scholars alike."

— D. N. Rodowick, University of Chicago



"Priya Joshi's work is a timely assessment of key films and periods in Bollywood's history. Its wide-ranging literary, theoretical, and sociocultural perspectives, which cut across literature, postcolonial studies, media, and cultural studies, will surely be taken up by other scholars as well as general readers. A fine piece of scholarship."

— Rajinder Dudrah, University of Manchester



High Tide

United Kingdom 2014
Directors: James Gillingham, Jimmy Hay
Certificate 15 93m 32s

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

This super-low-budget maternal melodrama stars Melanie Walters (best known as *Gavin & Stacey*'s Gwen) as a weirdly chirpy housewife who corrals her teenage son Josh (Samuel Davies) into a day of forced fun at the seaside. As the pair trudge over clifftops and marshlands, secrets are revealed and reconciliations enacted, though it's not until the film's closing moments that we learn what's at stake.

It's all very earnest, and one senses that the film – a first feature for Swansea-based writer-directors James Gillingham and Jimmy Hay – was a labour of love. But the best intentions can't compensate for the film's odd tonal shifts: its first half, essentially a two-hander between Walters and Davies, has a very theatrical feel (not helped by a rather mannered performance from Walters), while the drawn-out party scene that makes up the later stages looks like a bad music video. Rather than drawing us into the emotional drama, the filmmakers constantly push us away. The final coda should be a twist of the knife; instead it brings with it a kind of grim relief. **S**



Mum's the word: Samuel Davies, Melanie Walters

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
James Gillingham
Jimmy Hay
Written by
James Gillingham
Jimmy Hay
Director of Photography
Chris Lang
Edited by
Daniel Broughton
Composer
Matt Harding
Sound Editor
Tony Hobden
Costume
Sara Turner

©Long Arm Films
Production Companies
Bob & Co presents
a Long Arm film

Executive Producers
Alexia Parmentier
Max Parmentier
Melanie Walters
Bob Benton
Andy Brunskill
Amanda Murphy
Caroline Bouju

Cast
Melanie Walters
Bethan
Samuel Davies
Josh
Claire Cage
Tess
Charlotte Mulliner
Sophie
Matt Cooke
James Cameron
Sam Green

Joe James
themselves, Sam
Green and the
Midnight Heist
Rhys Isaac Jones
Sam

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Long Arm Films

Swansea, the present. Housewife Bethan takes her teenage son Josh out of school for a spur-of-the-moment trip to the seaside. She attempts to engage Josh in conversation but he is churlish and the atmosphere is tense. An argument breaks out, during which Bethan reveals that her husband, Josh's father, has been beating her. Mother and son make peace. The pair bump into fellow mum Tess, who invites them to a house party. A pleasant evening passes. While waiting for a taxi to collect them, Bethan dials 999. A flashback shows her husband's bloodied and inert body.

The Interview

USA 2014
Directors: Seth Rogen, Evan Goldberg
Certificate 15 111m 48s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

After the cyber-attack, the superpower tensions, presidential interventions, leaked emails, cancelled premiere and eventual piecemeal release, there is actually a movie. A larky, superficial, intermittently amusing bit of schedule-filling fluff that might have generated scant interest had it, in fine old Hollywood tradition, unfolded in a made-up country. So rather than a latterday romp in Hope and Crosby mould, or another frolic in the tradition of *The In-Laws* (1979) or *Ishtar* (1987), here we are pretending we're in the real North Korea poking fun at the real Kim Jong-un by sending in TV chat-show host James Franco and his producer Seth Rogen as unlikely CIA-backed assassins. Perhaps writing and directing partners Rogen and Evan Goldberg calculated that in the wake of *Team America: World Police* (2004), the Pyongyang regime was now available comedic territory, or indeed that having visited the apocalypse on Hollywood in their previous effort *This Is the End* (2013), they needed to come up with an encore, but whether they expected the diplomatic and industry-shaking turmoil eventually prompted by their efforts perhaps only an in-depth documentary will be able to uncover. If that does happen at some point, it'll doubtless prove more fascinating viewing than much of what's on show here.

To be fair, Franco has a lot of fun with Dave Skylark, an oleaginous creature of the small screen whose worldview just about stretches from Eminem's sexual proclivities to the lyrical insights of Katy Perry – but if the film points a few barbs at the relentless shallowness of US media's celeb-obsessed culture, that's a pretty easy target after all. As indeed is the potential fun to be had from the absurd self-mythologising of Kim Jong-un and his iron grip on his long-suffering nation, though the film lacks the will or indeed the budget to show us much of his surroundings beyond a concrete presidential compound

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Seth Rogen
Evan Goldberg
James Weaver
Screenplay
Dan Sterling
Kyle Hunter
Story
Seth Rogen
Evan Goldberg
Dan Sterling
Director of Photography
Brandon Trost
Editors
Zene Baker
Evan Henke
Production Designer
Jon Billington
Music
Henry Jackman
Production Mixer
Chris Duesterdiek
Costume Designer
Carla Hetland

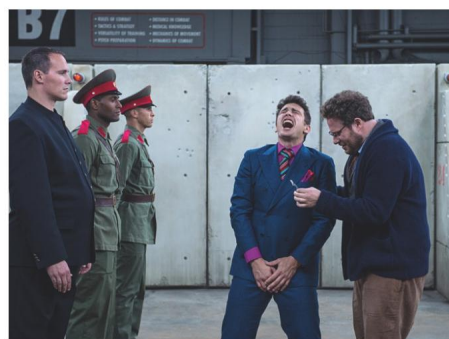
©Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc. and LSC Film Corporation
Production Companies
Columbia Pictures presents in

association with
LStar Capital a Point
Grey production
Executive Producers
Dan Sterling
Kyle Hunter
Ariel Shaffir
James Franco
Shawn Williamson
Ben Waisbren

Cast
James Franco
Dave Skylark
Seth Rogen
Aaron Rapaport
Lizzy Caplan
Agent Lacey
Randall Park
President Kim
Jong-un
Diana Bang
Sook
Timothy Simons
Malcolm

Dolby Digital/ Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing UK



My brilliant Korea: James Franco, Seth Rogen

that conveniently (if not entirely credibly) doubles as a TV studio and missile launch site.

The script toys with the odd moment of sympathy for Randall Park's Katy Perry-loving despot overshadowed by his fierce father's legacy, and even allows Kim to point out that the prison population per capita is higher in the US than in North Korea. For the most part, however, having come up with the outrageous assassination conceit at the heart of the story, the film settles for the formula of taking an action-movie attack-the-castle trope and putting amiable bumblers at the centre of it.

The result has all the ideological heft of a spoof James Bond flick, and although Rogen's concerned-liberal role allows him to flag up reports of North Korea's human-rights abuses, the film prefers to keep it light and deliver more screen time to the hapless straight-man having to conceal a CIA secret weapon up his butt. So, while reams of international coverage have discussed the geopolitical fallout from a supposed North Korean revenge cyber-attack in response to *The Interview*'s very existence, what's on screen is a would-be naughty yet essentially thematically unchallenging romp in which Kim-bashing knockabout has equal billing with the comedy of anal insertion. **S**

US, present day. Dave Skylark hosts a popular TV chat show. The show's producer, Aaron Rapaport, disapproves of its celebrity-obsessed content. When North Korean leader Kim Jong-un lists the programme among his favourites, Aaron contacts North Korean cultural officials; at a secret rendezvous in rural China, North Korean agent Sook offers him an interview with the president. Back in New York, CIA agent Lacey persuades Dave and Aaron to assassinate Kim during their visit, using a ricin strip to deliver a lethal handshake. Dave and Aaron travel to Pyongyang, where their closely chaperoned itinerary points out a well-stocked grocery store. At the presidential compound, Dave accidentally uses the ricin on a security officer, and is surprised to find himself bonding with an affable Kim over US pop culture. He becomes convinced that the stories about Kim are wrong, but following the death of the security officer, he sees Kim's paranoid-aggressive side and changes his opinion. With Aaron and the sympathetic Sook in the control room, the interview goes ahead; Dave, seemingly pliant at first, exposes Kim and his regime. A gun battle ensues. Dave, Aaron and Sook escape the presidential palace and board an army tank to down Kim's helicopter, with fatal results. Dave later pens a bestseller about his experience, while Aaron keeps in touch with Sook, now a leading candidate in newly democratised North Korea.

Jupiter Ascending

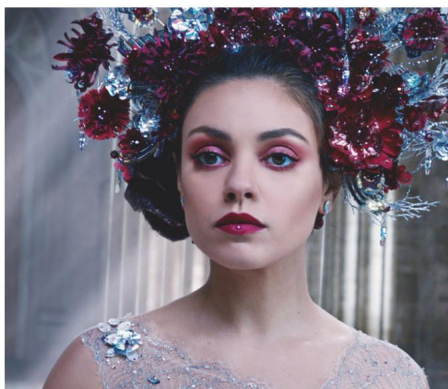
USA 2015
Directors: The Wachowskis
Certificate 12A 127m 22s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Cast as a badass Robert Smith-eyed interstellar bounty hunter in *Jupiter Ascending*, Channing Tatum seems to be channelling Gene Kelly's famous dictum from *Singin' in the Rain*: "Dignity, always dignity." While most of the other actors in Lana and Andy Wachowski's characteristically Wagnerian space opera seem content to camp it up, Tatum underplays to the point of self-effacement – like the kid in the hopeless high-school play who's just trying to keep his head down and make it to the after-party.

Not that Tatum has much to play. His character, Caine Wise, is part werewolf, which explains his slightly pointy ears and slavish, canine devotion to Jupiter Jones (Mila Kunis), a humble Chicago-area cleaner who is actually the genetic spitting image of the long-dead matriarch of an intergalactic royal family known as the House of Abrasax. As in *The Matrix* (1999), the Wachowskis contrive a scenario in which a slack-jawed audience surrogate is whisked away into an alternate reality whose operations require a lot of straight-faced exposition, and Tatum does his level best to explain how ancient aliens have been abducting human beings from Earth and harvesting their organs to prolong their own millennium-long lifespans. These scenes bring to mind the old story about Harrison Ford upbraiding George Lucas on the set of *Star Wars*: "You can type this shit, but you can't say it."

If Tatum projects a wariness that occasionally lines up nicely with his character's clouded motives, Eddie Redmayne throws himself bodily into his role as Balem, the film's chief villain, a Valium-voiced dandy who is trying to outmanoeuvre his decadent Abrasaxian siblings (Douglas Booth and Tuppence Middleton) and claim Jupiter – and with her, the Earth – as his own. With his eyes narrowed into slits and his already lithe body poured into a corset that would



Into flora: Mila Kunis

have defeated Scarlett O'Hara, Redmayne looks like a graphic-novel illustration come to life, and his absurdly haughty performance recalls all those great British actors gamely prancing their way through David Lynch's *Dune* (1984).

The main difference between *Jupiter Ascending* and *Dune* – and *Star Wars* – is that it unfolds in an almost entirely CGI diegesis. The tactile appeal of Lucas and Lynch's fantasias is nowhere in evidence, and while the Wachowskis take evident and earnest delight in crafting their images of imperial kingdoms in the sky, it's all so completely weightless that it keeps threatening to drift away – along with the viewer's attention. The filmmakers attempt to add ballast in the form of political commentary: we're meant to hiss the lethally chic Abrasaxians for strip-mining other planets and their inhabitants to stay forever young, but just as *Speed Racer*'s anti-corporate critique rang hollow in the context of a hugely scaled Hollywood adaptation of a Japanese anime, so too does the perfumed and pricey sci-fi pulp of *Jupiter Ascending* fail to convince as a condemnation of decadence. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Written and Directed by

The Wachowskis
[i.e., Lana Wachowski
Andy Wachowski]

Producers

Grant Hill
Lana Wachowski
Andy Wachowski

Director of Photography

John Toll

Edited by

Alexander Berner
Hugh Bateup

Production Designer

Michael Giacchino

Music

Michael Giacchino

Production Sound Mixer

Peter Lindsay

Costume Designer

Kym Barrett

Visual Effects

Double Negative

Framestore

Method Studios

One of Us

Bluebolt

Rodeo FX

BUF

Stunt Co-ordinators

R.A. Rondell

Christopher O'Hara

@Warner Bros.

Entertainment Inc.,

Village Roadshow

Films North America

Inc. and Ratpac-Dune

Entertainment

LLC - U.S., Canada,

Bahamas & Bermuda

@Warner Bros.

Entertainment Inc.,

Village Roadshow

Films (BVI) Limited

and Ratpac-Dune

Entertainment LLC -

All Other Territories

Production Companies

Warner Bros.

Pictures presents

in association with

Village Roadshow

Pictures, Ratpac-

Dune Entertainment,

Anarchos Productions

With the participation

of the Canadian Film

or Video Production

Services Tax Credit,

the Province of British

Columbia Production

Services Tax Credit

Québec Production

Services Tax Credit

Executive Producers

Roberto Malerba

Steve Mnuchin

Bruce Berman

Cast

Channing Tatum

Caine Wise

Mila Kunis

Jupiter Jones

Sean Bean

Stinger Apini

Eddie Redmayne

Balem Abrasax

Douglas Booth

Titus Abrasax

Tuppence Middleton

Kalique Abrasax

Doona Bae

Razo

James D'Arcy

Maximilian Jones

Tim Pigott-Smith

Maldictes

Dolby Digital/

Datasat/SDDS

Colour/Prints by

Technicolor

[2.35:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures

International (UK)

The Little Death

Australia/United Kingdom/Denmark 2014
Director: Josh Lawson

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The title, of course, directly translates the French phrase for orgasm, 'la petite mort', though this multi-strand Australian comedy is more fascinated by the myriad ways in which we reach our peak, rather than what happens when we get there. Other people's uncommon sexual proclivities have always been a source of humour, though actor-writer-director Josh Lawson finds pathos here too, exploring the escalating emotional turmoil that ensues when his characters are too reticent, perhaps even too ashamed, to admit what it is that really turns them on. Bouncing around between the travails of various couples, the film uses clinical sub-headings to flag up the unusual caprices on display in one middle-class Sydney suburb, from the fairly familiar 'sexual masochism' and 'role play' to the more specialised 'somniaophilia' (arousal from watching someone sleep) and 'dactyphilia' (yes, the sexual pleasure found in seeing someone cry).

Intercutting between the sundry threads once each story has been set in motion, Lawson's first feature succeeds best when events we think are going to be played for laughs turn unexpectedly poignant. Kate Box's Rowena, for instance, the dactyphiliac in the pack, drives her poor hubby to tears so often it's almost the end of their relationship, even though she's doing it to try to enliven the dutiful process of conceiving their first child. Similarly, meek Phil's somnophilia may prove not unrelated to his desire to be spared the abrasive nagging of his domineering spouse, while Dan's fetish for role-playing indicates underlying self-esteem issues.

These two segments rather outstay their welcome, but elsewhere Lawson's scripting is more surefooted, even in the most contentious vignette, where he also plays the husband gamely attempting to satisfy his wife's rape fantasies. There's some very funny dialogue when he and his sensible best mate tease out the logical inconsistency in such desires, since, they argue, actually wanting to be raped implies consent, which therefore means it can't be rape. Still, verbal jousting is one thing, but when Lawson's Paul starts staging surprise attacks on Bojana Novakovic's rather sweet Maeve, the film enters potentially problematic territory. A common fantasy, so the shrinks say, yet rape is hardly a laughing matter. Even so, Lawson gets away with it, since the seeming artificiality of lining up so many different proclivities lends the film a certain distancing effect, while its always



Standing guard: Kate Mulvany

Chicago, the present. Lonely cleaner Jupiter Jones (whose astronomer father was murdered by Russian goons before she was born) is almost killed by aliens at a fertility clinic while trying to donate her eggs so that her cousin can pay for his big-screen television. The man who saves her life is genetically spliced warrior Caine Wise, who explains that Earth is only one of countless planets with intelligent life, and that it is the property of an alien royal family known as the House of Abrasax. Caine is supposed to deliver Jupiter to Titus Abrasax but instead she is snatched by

bounty hunters, who take her to Kalique, Titus's sister. Kalique informs Jupiter that she is the reincarnation of Kalique's mother, and therefore Queen of Earth. Jupiter is increasingly attracted to Caine. However, she's kidnapped by Titus, who tries to make her marry him – so that he can murder her and inherit her ownership of Earth, which he and his siblings want to harvest for its natural resources. Caine stops the wedding. Jupiter is summoned by Balem, the third Abrasax sibling, who has abducted her family from Earth. Caine rescues her and returns her to Earth.

sympathetic laughter allows the drama to unfold in a sort of safe play area for adults, where extremes can be explored, seemingly without the characters coming to genuine harm.

In that sense, we never quite know how seriously to take all this, which eventually limits the film's overall impact, especially since its individual strands don't quite pull together to shape a unified effect. Still, when Lawson does manage to wring appealing humour and an authentic romantic glow from a startlingly outrageous, almost indescribable sequence involving a sign-language interpreter, a deaf caller and a telephone sex line, the signs are of an inventive, daring and distinctive talent emerging. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jamie Hilton
Michael Petroni
Matt Reeder
Written by
Josh Lawson
Director of Photography
Simon Chapman
Editor
Christian Gazal
Production Designer
Xanthe Highfield
Music
Michael Yezerski
Sound Recordist
Jules Ambroisine
Costume Designer
Ingrid Weir

©Ticket to Ride Pty Ltd, A.P. Facilities Pty Ltd, Josh Lawson, Night Kitchen Productions Pty Ltd, Red Apple Camera Rentals Pty Ltd and Pomeranz Investments Pty Ltd
Production Companies
eOne Films, LevelK and See

Pictures present in association with Screen Australia, Night Kitchen Productions, Red Apple, Spectrum Films with Head Gear Films and Metrol Technology a Ticket to Ride production
A film by Josh Lawson
Produced with the assistance of DeLuxe, Red Apple
Financed with the assistance of Kreo Films
Executive Producers
Josh Pomeranz
Viv Scanu
Stephen Boyle
Phil Hunt
Compton Ross

Cast
Josh Lawson
Paul
Bojana Novakovic
Maëve
Damon Herriman
Dan

Kate Mulvany
Evie
Kate Box
Rowena
Patrick Brammall
Richard
Alan Dukes
Phil
Lisa McCune
Maureen
Erin James
Monica
TJ Power
Sam
Kim Gyngell
Steve
Lachy Hulme
Kim

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Kaleidoscope Film Distribution

Sydney, present day. Paul is unsure how to react when his wife Maëve confesses that she wants him to rape her, just for the brief frisson of imagining that it might not be him. He's subsequently hospitalised when she fights back during an elaborate fake assault in a car park. A therapist suggests that Dan and partner Evie try role play to revive their stale sex life, which proves thrilling until Dan's selfish obsession with his acting prowess makes Evie question his parenting potential. Meanwhile, two years of trying for a baby have dampened Richard and Rowena's ardour, until she realises that she's turned on by the sight of him crying – prompting her to inflict deviously hurtful treatment on him, which almost ends their marriage before she does finally conceive. Rowena keeps her peccadillo secret, as does Phil, who's aroused by seeing acerbic spouse Maureen asleep, and uses illicit medication to knock her out and then dress her up. She suspects he's cheating on her, and he eventually leaves. Hearing-impaired telephone operator Monica finds unlikely romance through her job as a sign-language interpreter for deaf telephone users, interceding in Sam's call to a sex line. Later, when her car breaks down and she's offered a lift by neighbour (and registered sex offender) Steve, she switches off her hearing aid and ponders the mysteries of attraction – unaware that Steve, while stepping into the road to close her car bonnet, has been run over by Phil.

Lou!

Director: Julien Neel
Certificate 12A 102m 41s

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Lou! is the adaptation of a successful series of *bandes dessinées* (comics) aimed at pre-adolescent girls, written by Julien Neel and published between 2004 and 2012 in France. The books have already been adapted once as an animated television series, and now – for his first feature – Neel directs this live-action version, compressing episodes and characters spread between several books into one film.

It tells the story of Lou (Lola Lasseron), a girl on the brink of adolescence who lives in a close relationship with her charming but scatty mother Emma, played by Ludvine Sagnier, almost unrecognisable in huge glasses and brown wig. We follow the story from Lou's point of view, her droll voiceover detailing events and characters, echoing her illustrated journals: the film's French-release subtitle (*Journal intime*) is a pun on '*journal intime*', meaning a diary ('*intime*' translates as 'tiny'). Besides her depressed writer mother and their cat, Lou's life revolves around her friend Mina (Eden Hoch) and first crush Tristan (Joshua Mazé), on whom she obsessively spies. When new neighbour Richard (Kyan Khojandi) moves in, Lou engineers an encounter with her mother, hoping for an idyll.

Neel is on record as saying that he wrote the *Lou!* comics after noting the marginalisation of girls in the genre, and inspired by his own daughter. Indeed, as in its closing song, the bond between mother and daughter is at the heart of the film, something still rare enough in popular culture to be noted. *Lou!* thereby registers some changes in contemporary French society, such as broken families in which single mothers struggle to raise children, though still within a clean, middle-class, almost entirely white world. But despite the female focus of the film, including amusing scenes when Lou and Mina wryly observe their mothers treating their depression with macaroons, the view of gender and generational relations remains conventional. Pretty Emma and Lou both end up happily



Ma mère: Ludvine Sagnier

matched with appropriate males, whereas Emma's mother (albeit played by Nathalie Baye in a brilliantly scary cameo) is a caricature of the repressed single woman. Similarly Emma's fantasy sci-fi creation 'Sidera' embodies 'powerful' femininity in hyper-eroticised terms, a sex bomb also happily matched with a male counterpart.

The generic origins of *Lou!* are evident both in the cute humorous tone and the pastel colours that permeate the film. Deliberately mixing references, Neel's universe combines picturesque old buildings – as in a childish version of *Amélie* – with New York-style visuals (rooftop garden, fire-escape staircase) clearly inspired by the Hollywood romcom, while the owner of the local pizzeria owner is Chinese. The film in fact comes to life when ostensibly using pastiche: the explosion of animated sci-fi illustrating Sidera as Emma writes her novel, or the soap opera Lou and Mina shoot using dolls. However, if the huge success of the books shows that Neel reached his target audience, the address of the film is less clear, wavering between the teen pic and the more grown-up world of the French romcom without ever quite satisfactorily finding its place. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bruno Lévy
Harold Valentin
Screenplay
Julien Neel
Marc Syrigas
Adaptation/ Dialogue
Julien Neel
Based on *Lou!*
by Julien Neel
Director of Photography
Pierre Milon
Editor
Yannick Kergoat
Art Director
Sylvie Olive
Original Music
Julien Di Caro
Sound
Frédéric de Ravignan
Costume Designer
Olivier Bériot

Production Companies
A Move Movie,
Mother Production,
StudioCanal,
CinéFrance 1888,

France 2 Cinéma,
Scope Pictures
co-production
With the participation
of Canal+, Ciné+,
France Télévisions
and Belgacom
In association
with Indefilms 2
With the support
of CNC (Nouvelles
technologies en
production)

Cast
Ludvine Sagnier
Mum
Kyan Khojandi
Richard
Lola Lasseron
Lou
Nathalie Baye
Grandmother
Julie Ferrier
Sophie
Eden Hoch
Mina
Joshua Mazé
Tristan
Lily Taieb

Marie-Émilie
Léa Nataf
Karine
Virgile Hurard
Jean-Jean
Téo Yacoub
Preston
Sacha Vassort
Manolo
Anne Agbadou-
Masson
Jocelyne
Winston Ong
Gino
François Rollin
Henry

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
StudioCanal Limited

French theatrical title
Lou! Journal intime

An imaginary city, present day. Lou is an adolescent girl living with her mother Emma, a struggling translator, hopeless housewife and writer of science-fiction novels. The two are happy in their pleasantly chaotic flat, despite a lack of money and Lou's worries about her mother's depressed state – the latter is rarely out of her dressing gown, including when eating pizza in a local restaurant. Lou spends most of her time with her friend Mina, spying on neighbour Tristan, recording his every move in her illustrated journals. The two girls also film a pastiche soap opera with dolls, and discuss their mothers, who are friends. In her drive to cheer up her mother, Lou successfully introduces a cat into the household and engineers a meeting with new neighbour Richard. In the meantime, Lou temporarily breaks up with Mina, meets a new friend, Marie-Émilie, and makes up with Mina again. The girls finally meet Tristan and his male friends. As Lou and Tristan experiment with their first kiss (unsatisfactorily to begin with) and fall in love, so do Emma and Richard. This happy state of affairs is disrupted by the arrival of Lou's grandmother, a bitter woman who criticises Emma and Lou's lifestyle. She eventually softens, however, and encourages her daughter to publish her science-fiction novel, 'Sidera'. Richard and Emma knock through the wall between their flats to join their households together.

Mommy

Canada 2014
Director: Xavier Dolan
Certificate 15 138m 12s

See Feature
on page 32

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

The mobile photography application Instagram, which now has more than 150 million monthly users (including this author), has become one of the current generation's premier mediums for publicly (over)sharing personal images at a moment's notice. It's apt, then, that the prolific Québécois Xavier Dolan – who is now, remarkably, on his fifth feature at the tender age of 25 – has cribbed Instagram's boxy, constricting 1:1 aspect ratio to frame his latest effort. From its plaintive title to its histrionic ending, *Mommy* is a claustrophobic, incessantly heart-on-sleeve family melodrama that unfolds, for better and worse, with zero filter.

Mommy finds Dolan returning to the territory he explored in his eye-catching debut *I Killed My Mother* (2009): the fraught relationship between a single mother and her son. As explained in a portentous opening title card, *Mommy* is set in a fictional, vaguely dystopian Canada that has passed a controversial new law allowing parents to abandon their behaviourally disturbed children. This information becomes relevant when yellow-haired, ADHD-afflicted tearaway Steve (Antoine Olivier Pilon) is expelled from a juvenile institution for starting a fire and released back into the custody of his bolshie yet vulnerable widowed mother Diane (Anne Dorval): it's a situation that cannot, one suspects, end well. *Mommy*'s stressful opening stages track the attempts of this terrible twosome – who seem locked in an endless battle to out-pout, out-snarl and out-shout each other – to regain their bearings in each other's company. Dolan's tight framing accentuates their cacophonous existence, all screeching rows, violent encounters and barely suppressed oedipal tension in cluttered environments.

Though the commitment displayed by Pilon and Dorval is commendable, it's something of a relief – and a dramaturgical boon – when their blazing relationship is triangulated by a third party in the form of neighbour Kyla (Suzanne Clément, who projects an appealingly inscrutable aura). The timid Kyla, who suffers from a speech impediment, offers succour to both Steve and Diane, who end up fighting for her attention in different ways. As in Dolan's previous few films (*Heartbeats*, *Laurence Anyways*, *Tom at the Farm*), there's a refreshingly fluid, amorphous approach to sexuality and gender roles here, from Steve's periodic cross-dressing to the teasing hints of a relationship blossoming between the two women and the sense that a very modern family unit is being formed. It's no coincidence that Kyla's distant husband – the straightest, squarest character on show – is a spectral presence who's banished to the margins of the screen. Some of the film's best moments arrive in the electric scenes where Dolan's merciless framing pushes these two lonely women closer and closer together.

Aptly, an inspired framing choice accounts for *Mommy*'s best moment. Midway through, when things seem to be looking up for Steve, the camera tracks him fluidly as he glides down the street on his skateboard. Then, with a beatific smile on his face, he stretches his arms wide, and pulls the frame out into sun-dappled widescreen with him. In this audacious moment, Dolan marries



Mother and son: Antoine Olivier Pilon

his penchant for heightened artifice (there are similar, subtler moments in *Tom at the Farm*) with a genuine emotional clout. When Diane and Steve receive some subsequent bad news, and the frame shrinks meekly back into its square, the effect is devastating. Yet when Dolan pulls the same trick again later, it's divested of comparable heft: the novelty has already worn off, and it plays a little more like the type of self-conscious showboating that Dolan's harshest critics (who sharpened their knives when he shared the Jury Prize with old-school formal jester Jean-Luc Godard's *Goodbye to Language* at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival) frequently charge him with.

There is evidence elsewhere in *Mommy* of Dolan simply trying too hard. For one thing, 140

minutes is a long time to spend telling a fairly straightforward, small-scale story. And some of the musical choices are gauche – though perhaps Dolan deserves some credit for attempting to wring pathos from 'Blue', a particularly ingratiating mid-90s ditty by Europop outfit Eiffel 65.

Ultimately, though, despite Dolan's excesses, *Mommy* rarely feels like a cynical exercise in style and showmanship. Instead, the compassion that the young director evinces for his characters shines through, and it's refreshing to see an unconventional drama with two determinedly unorthodox female characters at its core. Dorval in particular does particularly fine work in keeping the brassy Diane away from the limiting pitfalls of camp. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nancy Grant
Xavier Dolan

Screenplay

Xavier Dolan

Director of Photography

André Turpin

Editor

Xavier Dolan

Art Director

Colombe Raby

Original Music

Noia

Sound Design

Sylvain Brassard

Costume Designer

Xavier Dolan

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Québec Inc.

Production Companies

Les Films Séville

presents a Metafilms

and Sons of Manual

production

With the financial

participation of

Téléfilm Canada,

SODEC, Québec

Crédit d'impôt
cinéma et télévision.
Crédit d'impôt
pour production
cinématographique
ou magnétoscopique
canadienne - Canada,
Ici Radio-Canada
With the collaboration
of Super Écran,
Ici ARTV

Cast

Anne Dorval
Diane 'Die' Després
Suzanne Clément
Kyla
Antoine Olivier Pilon
Steve O'Connor
Després
Patrick Huard
Paul
Alexandre Goyette
Patrick
Michèle Lituac
principal
Viviane Pascal
Marthe
Natalie Hamel-Roy
Natacha

In Colour
[1:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

Quebec, the present. Canada has passed a controversial new law allowing parents to abandon their behaviourally disturbed children. Diane, in her forties and recently widowed, is once again living with her 15-year-old ADHD-sufferer son Steve after he has been expelled from a juvenile detention centre for starting a fire. The pair fight and argue. Mysterious neighbour Kyla – a married teacher – is soon involved in their lives; she becomes firm friends with Diane, and helps to educate Steve. During one teaching session, Steve and Kyla have a spectacular argument, which ends with a stressed Steve accidentally urinating on himself. They reconcile. Diane is served with a \$250,000 lawsuit from the parents of a child who was burned in the fire started by Steve. Diane begins dating neighbour Paul, a lonely lawyer, in the hope that he might be able to offer legal and financial advice; however, their nightclub date goes horribly wrong. In a supermarket, a distressed Steve attempts suicide by slashing his wrist with a Stanley knife.

In a dream sequence, Steve graduates, grows up and has children. The dream sequence ends, and it is revealed that Diane has driven Steve to another juvenile detention institution. Later, Kyla tells a tearful Diane that she is moving to Toronto. Steve attempts to escape from the institution.

Project Almanac

USA 2014
Director: Dean Israelite
Certificate 12A 106m 3s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

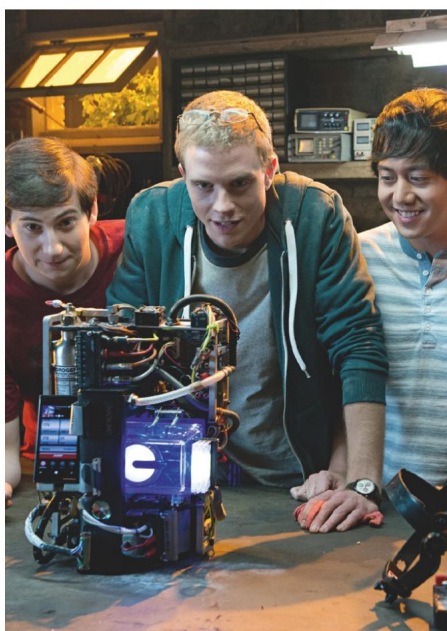
Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

"The time is out of joint," says Hamlet. "O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right."

Representation of time-tinkering in cinema has come a long way since 1989, when *Back to the Future Part II* had to include a laborious sequence involving diagrams on a blackboard to explain a relatively simple set of converging timelines resulting from a sports reference book from the future falling into the hands of a school bully in 1955 – and still audiences and critics complained about not following the premise. *Project Almanac* makes a joke about the blackboard, and trusts audiences to keep up with multiple timelines.

It's interesting that the time loop of *Project Almanac* should involve a comparatively modest hop back to 2004, the year of *Primer* and *The Butterfly Effect*, two tonally different films about the unintended consequences of time travel that seem to have fed equally into Andrew Stark and Jason Pagan's script. The contemporary cycle of time-scrambling took hold a little earlier, with *Donnie Darko* (2001) – a link in the chain of time-travel films from *Back to the Future* (1985) to a current spate (+1, *Coherence*, *Looper*, *About Time*, *Edge of Tomorrow*, *Predestination*, *Time Lapse*). It's a split decision as to whether this cycle took fire as a collective response to the trauma of 9/11 – a day so much 21st-century culture would earnestly wish were from another timeline – or a bleeding over into narrative strategies developed in computer games, which offer the option to try every scenario again in the hope of a different (winning) outcome.

In this cycle, tampering with time doesn't involve big schemes like killing Hitler (which teenage protagonist David pooh-poohs as impractical) or even saving a loved one from death. Here, the ability to unpick the present is used for trivial projects such as getting back at a bully, passing a school test (not as easy as it sounds – David's friend Quinn is reminded that it's about comprehension, not rote learning of facts, and has to replay a day several times before getting a passing score) or reprising the tiny conversational moment that could have set up a rapturous first kiss but (on the first



Sam Lerner, Jonny Weston, Allen Evangelista

go-round) caused the cooling of a budding relationship and an eventual estrangement.

Dean Israelite's film – an essay in the found-footage genre of *Cloverfield* (2008), *Chronicle* (2012), *Earth to Echo* (2014) and any number of horror films – has modest ambitions but works them out with satisfying rigour. The exuberant ride begins to get shaky with throwaways such as a witty shot of David and friends grimly disappointed as they accept a \$1,800,000 lottery cheque which would have been \$53,000,000 if they hadn't misread the winning numbers in the present before tripping back a day to cheat their way to an easy life. Then, chaos escalates as secondary characters change at a rapid, disorienting pace and even the hero's life-hack means that he is suddenly in a relationship but has no memory of its progress – missing out on a crucial first-time sexual experience that he's now worked into his backstory. As often, there's a moral about cheating to avoid responsibility or painful failure, but also a wish-fulfilment appeal to the possibilities of fracturing reality. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Michael Bay
Andrew Form
Brad Fuller

Written by

Jason Harry Pagan
Andrew Deutschman

Director of

Photography

Matthew Lloyd

Edited by

Julian Clarke
Martin Benfield

Production Designer

Maier Ahmad

Sound Mixer

Drew Ponder

Costume Designer

Mary Jane Fort

©Paramount Pictures

International

Production

Companies

Insurge Pictures
in association

with Michael Bay
present a Platinum
Dunes Production
With the participation
of the Georgia Film,
Music & Digital
Entertainment Office,
a division of the
Georgia Department
of Economic
Development
This production
participated in the

New York State
Governor's Office
for Motion Picture
and Television
Development
Post Production
Credit Program
Executive Producers
Josh Appelbaum
André Nemec
Vicki Dee Rock
Film Extracts
Bill & Ted's Excellent

Adventure (1988)

Cast

Jonny Weston
David Raskin
Sofia Black-D'Elia
Jessie Pierce
Sam Lerner
Quinn Goldberg
Allen Evangelista
Adam Le
Virginia Gardner

Christina Raskin
Amy Landecker
Kathy Raskin

**Dolby Digital/
Datasat
In Colour
[2.35:1]**

Distributor
Paramount
Pictures UK

Atlanta, Georgia, present day. Teenager David Raskin discovers a video camera that belonged to his late father, and looks at footage taken at his seventh birthday party – only to catch sight of his present-day self among the guests. With friends Adam and Quinn and sister Christina, David discovers that his father was working on a time-travel device. They get the machine working – accidentally involving Jessie, a girl David has a crush on. Realising that they can act in the past to tweak the

present, the group arrange a lottery win. Bungling a crucial moment with Jessie, David defies the team's rule against solo time trips to try again. He returns to a present where they are a couple, but ripple effects lead to disasters. Finally returning to 2004, he talks his father into destroying his work, preventing the cycle from starting. In 2014, he discovers the video camera, which now contains footage shot in the alternate timeline. He approaches Jessie again and strikes up a conversation.

Rigor Mortis

Hong Kong 2013
Director: Juno Mak

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The Hong Kong film industry has come close to flatlining since 2000, with its best established directors opting to work in China and its survival in the hands of such erratic figures as Johnnie To and Pang Ho-Cheung. But a few mavericks have tried to fill the talent-gap by using their professional connections to make arty commercial features; they include Wong Kar Wai's sometime graphic designer Wing Shya and Eric Tsang's former protégé Wong Ching-Po, both of whom are thanked in the end-credits of *Rigor Mortis*. Juno Mak was better placed than either to make a film on his own terms. Born in Hong Kong and raised in Vancouver, he has been a top Canto-pop star since 2002 and started dabbling in movies as an actor and scriptwriter in 2009. This debut feature as co-writer and director puts him some way ahead in the 'maverick' pack.

Rigor Mortis explicitly refers back to Ricky Lau's four-film *Mr Vampire* series (1985-88) and Lau's abortive reboot of the franchise *Mr Vampire 1992* (1992) by casting Chin Siu Ho as a washed-up movie actor named 'Chin Siu Ho' who never achieved much after his early success. (Chin played one of the Taoist exorcist's gaffe-prone assistants – the late Ricky Hui was the other – in both the original *Mr Vampire* and the attempted reboot; *Rigor Mortis* is rather touchingly dedicated to Hui and to the late Lam Ching-Ying, who played the exorcist.) Several other members of this cast are also veterans of the 1980s series: Antony 'Friend' Chan, Chung Fat and Richard Ng. Here, the fictional Chin moves into a haunted apartment, intending to hang himself, only to be drawn into a Taoist exorcist's battle with a ghost-infused 'hopping vampire' (the Chinese term *jiang shi* actually means 'rigid corpse') created by a black magician.

No believer in the slow build-up, Juno Mak starts at the end with Chin and exorcist Yau (Antony Chan), both seriously wounded, stirring amid the debris of the final, cataclysmic battle,



Written on the body: Chin Siu Ho

Robot Overlords

United Kingdom/Canada 2014
Director: Jon Wright

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Director Jon Wright has previously shown imagination and flair with a small-scale teenage horror film (*Tormented*) and a witty science-fiction monster movie (*Grabbers*), both of which reshaped American genre models to suit specific English and Irish milieux. Here, co-scripting with Mark Stay, he ambitiously attempts to realise a global alien occupation by clunky *Transformers*-type robots on a Britfilm budget, delivering a romp that has the cheeky, charming feel of a Michael Bay or Roland Emmerich movie mounted by the Children's Film Foundation.

Robot Overlords includes lots of things it's impossible not to love, especially in the context of British cinema: hovering robot menaces, standing stones, a dour seaside location, a Spitfire in flight, Ben Kingsley as an evil Liverpoolian collaborator and Roy Hudd as a martyr to the resistance, while Gillian Anderson gives *Paddington*'s Sally Hawkins stiff competition for the title of Britain's Best Mum.

The film can't quite stretch its resources to match its scale, and the urgent fight-back against a robot empire (represented by a creepy child-sized interpreter who has a *Village of the Damned* presence) dawdles a bit to take in raucous cameos by Tamer Hassan and Geraldine James as former criminals having an end-of-the-world party and turning heroic.

The human villain has one interesting moment, as he seethes about the violent, drunken, troublemaking louts who made the fading seaside town awful to live in before the robots came and imposed a brutal, all-seeing order from above, like some galactic combination of police drones and CCTV. But this isn't a film that wants to pursue social issues even on the level of *Attack the Block* (2011). Instead, we're off to join the rebels with young hero Sean Flynn after his pals rig up an old car battery to short-circuit the overlords' tracker chip in a demonstration of the what-we-did-in-the-holidays soldering-irons-and-sticky-tape ingenuity that is the film's overriding principle.



Battery included: Callan McAuliffe, Ben Kingsley

Sean's hero journey involves reuniting with his fighter-pilot dad Danny (Steven Mackintosh), who is living in a hippie peace camp beyond the robots' ken, and getting his parents back together while seeing off weaselly little Hitler Robin Smythe (a character name that makes him sound more like an odious 1970s sitcom nemesis than a science-fiction villain) and an interstellar mechanical hegemony.

The amusing, self-referential seam of low-tech British bodgery is carried through when it turns out that dad's all-mechanical WWII fighter plane can't be taken over by the computerised aliens, and Danny gets an all-too-brief dogfight with drones while Sean uses a fluke superpower to pitch one flying supercraft into another and finally send the whole invading empire packing. The robots, to the discerning, resemble GoBots more than Transformers, packing themselves into cubes when inactive, and might also be descended from Kurt Neumann's *Kronos* (1957), among the first all-machine invaders, or Superman's second-favourite arch-enemy Brainiac.

A few moments of crude humour and some distressing material in an early scene suggest that Wright hasn't completely abandoned the more grown-up elements of his gleefully nasty earlier films, though this is primarily a family-friendly kids-vs-aliens adventure.

and then tells the whole humourless story in flashback, introducing apparitions from the get-go and piling on supernatural menaces non-stop on the way to the showpiece finale. He then rather cruelly caps the fantasy by rationalising it as Chin's dying-moment dream; Chin actually does hang himself, and the final twist of the director's blade is the revelation that his obsession with a voicemail from his young son is one more wish-dream, since the son is now an adult.

Crammed with spectacular CGI and effects-assisted violent action, the film in some ways resembles over-designed horror-fantasies from Japan and South Korea. But the work is meticulously detailed, the gothic poetry is often potent, Mak is not afraid of long, intense takes, and the cast give performances of remarkable gravity, far above Hong Kong film industry norms. Mak reportedly went to 50-60 takes for some shots, suggesting a Sternberg-worthy level of perfectionism. *Rigor Mortis* won't revive its genre, but the way it pays dues to a closed chapter in Hong Kong film history is pretty spiffy.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Takashi Shimizu Juno Mak	Action Choreographer Jack Wong	Anthony 'Friend' Chan Yau
Written by Philip Yung Jill Leung Juno Mak	@Kudos Films Limited	Richard Ng Uncle Tung
Director of Photography Ng Kai Ming	Production Company Kudos Films Limited presents a Juno Mak film	Lo Hoi Pang Uncle Yin
Editor David Richardson	Executive Producers Steven Lo Bernard Lai	Chung Fat Uncle Gau
Production Designer Irving Cheng		Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Music Composer Nath Connolly	Cast Chin Siu Ho Chin Siu Ho	Distributor Metrodome Distribution
Sound Mixer Angus Mak	Kara Wai Yeung Feng	Chinese theatrical title
Costume Designer Miggy Cheng Phoebe Wong	Nina Paw Auntie Mui	Geung si
Visual Effects Herbgarden Limited		

Hong Kong. Thinking of his abandoned wife and young son, washed-up film actor Chin Siu-Ho moves into Apartment 2442 on a decrepit housing estate to commit suicide. He is saved from death by Yau, a Taoist exorcist, but soon realises that the building is haunted. The deranged Feng and her albino son Pak keep loitering outside his door. The grumpy, retired Tung suffers a fatal accident on the building's stairs; his widow Mui turns to black magician Gau to bring Tung back, and is instructed to keep the corpse masked and in darkness for seven days. Gau ambushes Chin and allows two powerful female ghosts to possess him. (They are twin sisters who killed themselves in Apartment 2442 many years earlier after being assaulted by Feng's husband.) Yau again rescues Chin and restrains the ghosts. Mui disobeys Gau's instructions and Tung becomes a 'rigid corpse' vampire; Mui lets him kill Pak because Gau's spells require blood from a virgin. Searching for her son, Feng inadvertently frees the ghosts. Yau confronts Gau and learns that he is using the ghost twins' power to animate Tung. Yau devises a Taoist trap for the now hugely strong Tung, and enlists Chin's help to fight the monster. The fight is cataclysmic but Tung is finally defeated. Mui kills herself to join him in death... Washed-up film actor Chin Siu-Ho moves into Apartment 2442 and commits suicide. His adult son visits the morgue to see the corpse.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Piers Tempest Justin Garak Ian Flook Steve Milne	Sound Mixer Derek Hehir	British Film Company, Embankment Films, Nvizible and Northern Ireland Screen	Steve Christian Chris Clark Ivan Dunleavy Christian Eisenbeiss Hugo Grumbar Tim Haslam Nic Hatch Mark Huffam Steve Norris Aqeel Zaman	Callan McAuliffe Sean Flynn James Tarpey Nathan Ella Hunt Alex Milo Parker Connor Steven Mackintosh Danny Craig Garner Mediator 452 Tamer Hassan Wayne Roy Hudd Morse Code Martin Geraldine James	Monique
Screenplay Mark Stay Jon Wright	Costume Designer Hazel Webb-Crozier	Executive Producers			
Director of Photography Fraser Taggart	Production Companies @Mediator 452 Limited/British Film Institute				
Editor Matt Platts-Mills	Production Designer Tom McCullagh				
Composer Christian Henson	Composer Wasted Talent film in association with				

An English seaside town, three years after the arrival of alien robots that have crushed all resistance and subjugated the remains of humanity by implanting them with monitor chips. Angry teenager Sean Flynn lives with his mother Kate, orphaned ten-year-old Connor and his grandfather Martin. Sean believes that his father, RAF pilot Danny, is still alive, though he has been missing since the invasion. Kate fends off the advances of Robin Smythe, who collaborates

with the robots and helps them keep the local population under control. With friends Alex and Nathan, Sean discovers that an electric shock disables the robots' monitor chips for a few hours. The friends venture outside in the hope of scavenging supplies; eventually they rally a group of local criminals to join a party of resistance fighters – which includes Danny – in a desperate but ultimately successful attempt to overthrow the robot overlords.

Rurouni Kenshin The Legend Ends

Director: Otomo Keishi
Certificate 15 134m 18s

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

A live-action version of a bestselling Japanese manga that seemed fresh in the 1990s, *Rurouni Kenshin* stars Satoh Takeru as the girlish antihero Kenshin, who must reform his wicked ways in order to defeat his nemesis Shishio (Fujiwara Tatsuya), an unkillable demon-swordsman with what seem like the fires of hell at his disposal. Kenshin has barely survived his previous encounter with Shishio and is nursed back to health by his former sensei Hiko (Fukuyama Masaharu). Over the days of training that follow, Kenshin realises that the only way he can progress to another level of swordsmanship is to vow never to kill another man, and so he resolves to fight only with a blunt sword intended to disable rather than destroy.

The two previous Kenshin films have mercifully left this final grand-slam conclusion reasonably free from exposition, and curiously it stands well enough on its own. The films' writer-director Otomo Keishi believes that he has improved on the films of Kurosawa (in so far as the computer-games generation would now find them "long and slow"), but he has little skill with directing actors, though he makes up for this with a sense of decoration, colour and some visual richness.

With his cupid's-bow mouth, crosshatched beauty-scar and tumbling auburn fringe, Japanese TV actor Satoh brings the non-threatening boy motif to its formal apogee when Kenshin renounces violence. His nemesis Shishio, who is swathed in bandages to protect the ulceration of his entire body, like some kind of *koryu* Imhotep, is by now barely human; visually he's a mixture, one part Mummy to one part Barbossa from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and his pleasure in his own evil is the stuff of vaudeville. He is the embodiment of inflammation, a counterbalance to the cooling Zen of Kenshin, who by the end, in his admiration of autumn trees, is more Fotherington-Thomas than Kitano Takeshi.

Whereas many westerns revolve around battles between big business and the individual, Japanese equivalents explore the struggle between the old and the new. Was the Meiji



To put it bluntly: Satoh Takeru

period and the westernisation of Japan from the 1860s a good thing, or a bad thing, as many, including the writer Mishima Yukio, believed? There is a nod towards this point of view when we meet a beautiful courtesan on Shishio's steampunk ironclad ship; she has lost her trade and identity thanks to imported western ideas of decorum. But the rest of Shishio's crew simply seem like bandits and buccaneers, dressed absurdly, since the director knows as well as anyone that the best way to flag up an anime or cartoon heritage in a live-action film is to tweak the costumes. Shishio's crew are freaks set against an orthodoxy, and that orthodoxy is shown to be pretty conniving and shallow.

The film flags halfway through and the female characters are shown as either ciphers or (in the case of Kaoru, played by Takei Emi) simply sound asleep for most of the time. Music is vaguely orchestral and there are a couple of award-winning songs by One Ok Rock (a kind of Japanese Good Charlotte) to busy things up. The legend ends – and not a moment too soon. Ⓢ

Sea Without Shore

United Kingdom/Brazil 2013
Directors: André Semenza, Fernanda Lippi

Reviewed by Mark Sinker

As an account of a love affair between two women, and its terrible aftermath, roughly 125 years ago, *Sea Without Shore* achieves a daunting intensity of austere beauty but will also stir in many viewers (I suspect) an uneasy frustration. It's a tough film to write about, as its makers possibly intend, for what we see or hear on screen is forbiddingly elliptical. And as for the story being told, the press material says that it's about *fin de siècle* love and loss. The *mise en scène* arguably supports this, but all primary tools of narrative are refused, rendering plot summaries uncertain at best.

It's further unclear which scenes – and which characters – are intended as symbolic: the film opens with two women cycling, walking and sitting together in a beautiful Scandinavian countryside of lakes and woodlands, but it soon enters terrains of snow and ice, shuttered rooms and the kinds of dark forests found in fairytales. If this suggests an overall causal order, from pleasant to awful, individual scenes return and repeat – which may or may not be a depiction of painful, obsessive memory. Two other women appear to a minor extent: did they feature in the love story, or are they mythic representations? The love affair apparently ended – or anyway turned wintry, shadowed and grim. Did someone leave? Did someone die? Did something more sinister happen? Was the entire passion someone's imaginary folly? The torture of an unrequited (or socially forbidden) infatuation?

To make things murkier still, there's no dialogue: the only words we hear are Swedish voiceovers intoning translated selections from the poems of Swinburne, the scandalous lesbian symbolist Renée Vivien and the 17th-century poet Katherine Philips (whom the press kit describes as lesbian, though apparently not everyone agrees). The original soundtrack is seamlessly fashioned from field recordings and collaged electronic treatments by Andrew M. McKenzie of The Hafler Trio, though more recognisable pieces are also heard, notably three Chopin nocturnes. McKenzie has a reputation as a meticulous if prickly experimentalist, but here his sounds function straightforwardly enough as edge-of-attention mood-setting, sometimes serene, much more often foreboding. Recorded as if echoing in vast panelled rooms, the Chopin is arguably more hackneyed; if it conjures the stifling empty boredom of Victorian schoolrooms, it's still a device we've probably encountered too often elsewhere. The filmmaking – meaning the placing and movement of cameras, the framing of action and so on – is entirely orthodox; one might call it unobtrusively naturalistic. Certainly it doesn't distract from the performances, and seems intent on placing them at the centre of the work.

The film was devised and made by Zikzira Physical Theatre, an Anglo-Brazilian company centred around choreographer-performer Fernanda Lippi (here also playing "woman with long black hair") and Swedish-Italian-Swiss filmmaker André Semenza. According to Zikzira's self-description and declaration of general intent, it seeks "totality of artistic expression from the instinctive core, in a synthesis of artforms", in which "somatic

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Fukushima Satoshi

Screenplay

Fuji Kiyomi

Otomo Keishi

Based on the

original comic

Rurouni Kenshin by

Nobuhiro Watsuki

Cinematography

Ishizaka Takuro

Edited by

Imai Tsuyoshi

Production Designer

Hashimoto Sou

Music

Sato Naoki

Sound Recording

Masuko Hiroaki

Yomogita Tomokazu

Costume/

Character Design

Sawataishi Kazuhiro

Production

Companies

Warner Bros. Pictures

Japan presents in

association with

'Rurouni Kenshin

The Legend Ends'

Film Partners a

Warner Bros. Pictures

Japan production

Cast

Satoh Takeru

Himura Kenshin

Takei Emi

Kamiya Kaoru

Iseya Yusuke

Shinomori Aoshi

Aoki Munetaka

Sagara Sanosuke

Aoi Yu

Takani Megumi

Kamiki Ryunosuke

Seta Soujiro

Tsuchiya Tao

Makimachi Misao

Tanaka Min

Kashiwazaki Nenji

Ozawa Yukiyo

Hirobumi Ito

Fukuyama Masaharu

Hiko Seijuro

Eguchi Yosuke

Saito Hajime

Fujiwara Tatsuya

Shishio Makoto

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures

International (UK)

Japanese

theatrical title

Rurouni Kenshin

Densetsu no

saigo-hen

Fantasy Japan, the 1860s. In a flashback scene, we see a small boy burying bodies in the aftermath of a battle; a samurai, Hiko, decides to train him. In further flashbacks, we see the boy, now the adult Kenshin, escaping from a battle on an ironclad ship into the sea and nearly drowning. Hiko is disgusted to discover that his protégé now has a reputation as a brutal killer and sets about trying to restrain him ready for a showdown with his nemesis Shishio. Kenshin, chastened and ashamed, vows never to kill another man. Meanwhile the villainous Shishio and his crew have set sail in his seemingly invincible ironclad ship with the intention of bringing down the western-influenced Meiji government and returning Japan to a warring shogunate. To buy time, the Meiji government agrees with Shishio that it will arrest Kenshin and execute him in public. But the execution is a ruse to flush out Shishio, and Kenshin battles his way on to the ironclad. Kenshin is accompanied by some of his friends and together they fight the 'Ten Swords' henchmen. In the heat of battle, Shishio self-combusts after Kenshin perfects a 'Dragon Flight of Heaven' move.

A Second Chance

Denmark/Sweden/Norway 2014

Director: Susanne Bier

Certificate 15 101m 57s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

There's a moment in this latest collaboration between screenwriter Anders Thomas Jensen and director Susanne Bier that typifies the strengths and indeed intermittent weaknesses of their six films together. Sanne, a young mother who's been neglecting her baby and seemingly shares the drug problems of her abusive partner Tristan, is being questioned by Andreas, the upstanding, handsome cop at the centre of the story. As Sanne, May Andersen is especially strong here, offering a touching defence of her marginalised character's right to motherhood notwithstanding the detective's superior disapproval, and in an instant persuading the audience to wonder if we too share the same patronising prejudices.

Causing us to think again is where Bier and Jensen truly show their mettle – as in the provocative examination of violence and 'civilised' behaviour marking their 2010 film *In a Better World*. In this instance, however, after the initial frisson has passed it becomes only too evident that it's been achieved by heavily stacking the storytelling odds, ostensibly demonising white-trash Sanne and Tristan – and their poor kid Sofus rolling around in his own poo – while encouraging our identification with the rural bourgeois idyll of Nikolaj Coster-Waldau's well-meaning Andreas, trophy wife Anna (Maria Bonnevie) and their cute infant son Alexander.

Of course, controlling the viewer's emotional responses is what narrative film is all about, but it gets problematic when we're rather too aware of the means of control aiming to cajole us hither and thither. Jensen's screenplay ensures that fate has various reversals in store for this key quartet of characters, though the over-explicit title drops such a massive hint at the story's defining event that it hardly comes as much of a surprise when it arrives. By this point, we've long suspected that golden couple Andreas and Anna will eventually be on the receiving end, given the film's ominous string-laden score and chilly blue-tinted cutaways to bare trees and brooding stretches of water.

Such self-conscious pillow shots are uncharacteristic of Bier, whose no-fuss empathetic camerawork usually creates an intimate relationship between her performers and the audience, allowing 2004's *Brothers*, say, to barrel through its sundry twists and turns and keep us swept up in the action. That punchy approach obviously wasn't



Ulrich Thomsen, Nikolaj Coster-Waldau



Romantic agony: Fernanda Lippi, Livia Rangel

impulses provoke somatic responses". Backdrop and voiceovers notwithstanding, we are mainly here to watch bodies abstractly flexing, writhing and flailing themselves ragged.

A feature of vanguard artforms from around the 1950s, which quickly became a bug, is a dependence on prefatory material, from manifestos to press-release contextualisation, to do the heavy lifting the work itself isn't quite prepared to do – material you have to absorb and trust, localised codes and conventions of expressive technique you have to master, if half of what follows isn't to go straight over your head. Of course, an aesthetic practice focused purely on physical movement can indeed highlight what orthodox storytelling may obscure or even distort, drilling forensically down into key details elsewhere marginalised. The problem arises when we try to bring such details back into ordinary conversation. Without a suggested pathway to discussion, we likely end up scouring the surrounding context, speculating, projecting, making too much of the clues we're given, seeking them where they're not. If, for example, this film is telling us something about 19th- (or 17th-) century attitudes towards lesbians, or about the intimacies and difficulties of same-sex friendship, then nearly everything specific to these topics is what's been stripped out. If it's pointing us to the eternal verities of lost love, we're given nothing to help us apply them to our own situation. The potential play of levels you'd find in anything more conventional – where conflicting perspectives unavoidably grind against one another – is exactly what's been sacrificed. Some will by now have taken flight towards the usual get-out clause: *it's all just incomprehensible nonsense*.

A rigour of near-minimalist gesture can of

course be compelling – for example when a viewer's search for meaning overlaps with that of someone in the story. But what becomes compulsive need not be enjoyable. As rhythm, almost everything we're watching seems less sexual than pathological, more a reminder of problematic psychological-neurological conditions than anything we'd want to encounter ourselves. The poem fragments are selected for corrosively self-abnegating romanticism; overall it's a comfortless spectacle, relentlessly dour, self-dramatising, even adolescent. Zikzira certainly believe we will discover things about love and loss that we'd miss by any other means. But surely some of what we discover is realising how much we miss what we're not being given. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

André Semenza
Fernanda Lippi

Voice-over

Screenplay

Devised by

André Semenza

Words by

Charles Algernon

Swinburne

Katherine Philips

Renée Vivien

Fernanda Lippi

Story Devised by

André Semenza

Fernanda Lippi

Marcus Waterloo

Director of

Photography

Marcus Waterloo

Editor

André Semenza

Production Design

Marcus Waterloo

Fernanda Lippi

André Semenza

Original

Soundtrack

The Hafler Trio

Sound Supervisor

Glenn Freemantle

Costume Design

Fernanda Lippi

Marcus Waterloo

Choreography

Fernanda Lippi

©Maverick

Motion, Zikzira

Physical Theatre

Production

Companies

Maverick Motion,

Zikzira Physical

Theatre present

Cast

Livia Rangel

woman in lace dress

Fernanda Lippi

woman with long

black hair

Anna Mesquita

af Sillén

forest woman

Ankie Hermansson

horse woman

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Maverick Motion

Using image, sound, poetry and physical theatre, the film explores the tormented aftermath of a love affair between two women in 19th-century rural Sweden.

on here, since it might have made the button-pushing story elements (infant mortality, kidnapping) seem even more crass. Trouble is, giving the viewer so many contemplative, moody interludes, while this does indeed allow the emotional temperature to settle, also provides ample space for the contrivances of the story design to appear even more clunky and obvious.

Contrived events and foolish behaviour might sit appropriately in a bittersweet yet basically comedic affair such as Jensen and Bier's *Love Is All You Need* (2012), but they're misplaced here. The result comes over like some penny dreadful pretending it's got arthouse class, as Coster-Waldau's protagonist makes sundry unwise decisions which push the story along to a predetermined outcome that might have seemed thematically satisfying on paper, yet on screen plays like a bit of a fix. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Sisse Graum Jørgensen	Entertainments34 ApS & Zentropa International Sweden AB	Andreas Ulrich Thomsen Simon
Screenplay Anders Thomas Jensen	Production Companies Zentropa	Maria Bonnevie Anna
Story Anders Thomas Jensen	Entertainments34 presents in co-production with FilmFyn, Zentropa International	Nikolaj Lie Kaas Tristan
Director of Photography Michael Snyman	Sweden, Film i Väst With the support of Det Danske Filminstitut, Svenska Filminstitutet, Eurimages, Nordisk Film & TV Fond	Lykke May Andersen Sanne
Editor Pernille Bech Christensen	In co-operation with DR, Sveriges Television	Søs Egelind Caroline
Art Directors Jacob Stig Olsson Louise Lönnborg Gilles Balabaud	A film by Susanne Bier	In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Music Johan Söderqvist		Distributor Vertigo Films
Sound Eddie Simonsen Anne Jensen		Danish theatrical title En chance til
Costume Designer Signe Sejlund		
©Zentropa	Cast Nikolaj Coster-Waldau	

Provincial Denmark, several years ago. Detectives Andreas and Simon bust the seedy apartment of violent junkie Tristan and find his frightened girlfriend Sanne seemingly unable to care for their baby son Sofus. She tests clean for drugs and so they're allowed to keep the child. Meanwhile Andreas and his wife Anna are having sleepless nights with their new baby Alexander. One morning they discover that Alexander has died in his sleep; a traumatised Anna refuses to call the authorities. Andreas gives her a sedative and drives to Tristan's house and swaps the babies while Tristan and Sanne are sleeping. On discovering the dead child, Tristan blames Sanne and, determined to avoid jail, stages a kidnapping – which Andreas and Simon are called in to investigate. Eventually Sanne is taken into psychiatric care, adamant that her child isn't dead. Andreas gets Tristan to confess that he buried the baby in woodland. Anna, unable to accept Andreas's justification of giving Sofus a second chance, commits suicide. The autopsy on Alexander reveals the secret that she was concealing: the child died from shaken baby syndrome. Realising what Andreas has done, Simon drives him and Sofus to the hospital so that Sanne and the child can be reunited, suggesting that mitigating circumstances will see Andreas lose his job but avoid prison.

Present day. Now working in a hardware store, Andreas sees Sanne and Sofus healthy and thriving.

Seventh Son

USA/People's Republic of China 2014

Director: Sergei Bodrov

Certificate 12A 102m 2s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Seventh Son, a new sword-and-sorcery boondoggle, is something like the exact inverse of Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* trilogy. Where Jackson took one slim book and stretched it out into eight- or nine-plus hours of screen-time (it depends which editions you're looking at), an inhabitable universe with time for lulls and idylls, *Seventh Son* feels like an epic feat of world-building corseted into a small, straining vessel.

The source for *Seventh Son* is *The Spook's Apprentice*, a 2004 fantasy novel by Joseph Delaney that introduces Tom Ward, the newly chosen apprentice of 'Spook' Master Gregory and hero of a 13-book cycle called 'The Wardstone Chronicles'. (Perusal of a plot synopsis suggests that the screenplay deviates freely.) The part of Gregory, a specialist in terminating evil spirits, is filled by Jeff Bridges, looking like a dissipated musketeer and doing the role as something like Walter Matthau playing Falstaff, while Tom is portrayed by Ben Barnes, the Prince Caspian of a couple of *Narnia* movies. The film ends with Gregory stepping aside so that Tom may ascend to the role of Spook and presumably shoulder future franchise instalments, though it's highly unlikely that anyone will have to worry about that – Legendary Pictures lost its shirt on this particular gamble.

I can't say to what degree *Seventh Son*, scheduled for early 2013 release and then repeatedly delayed by various postproduction and boardroom dramas, now resembles the vision of its director, Sergei Bodrov. What's sure is that it isn't a movie that allows much time for dust to gather. It opens with thunderous drums, a showy time-lapse effect and a rampaging wyvern squawking "My power returns with the rise of the blood moon" as it barrels towards the viewer (in 3D!) to burst free of imprisonment, and from there the onslaught scarcely ceases. There are scraps of lore, there are



Rapt pupil: Ben Barnes, Jeff Bridges

beasties and backstory. If there's any pretext for the camera to crane or helicopter about, it probably will; if there isn't, chances are it will anyway.

That above-mentioned wyvern, when in human form, takes the shape of witch Mother Malkin – that is, Julianne Moore wearing an enormous collar of raven feathers. Freed, Mother Malkin begins to rally around her a coven of shape-shifting witches and warlocks, played by Djimon Hounsou, Jason Scott Lee, Kandysse McClure, Luc Roderique and Zahf Paroo. With the exception of Moore and Antje Traue, who plays Malkin's sister Bony Lizzie, the servants of darkness are all black or Asian – in fact, they are the only prominent non-white actors in the movie. When Tom briefly rebels against Master Gregory's hate-fuelled, take-no-prisoners attitude towards his sworn enemies, I started to wonder if this was meant to be some kind of parable for culture clash or race relations, but the witches and warlocks all wind up righteously slaughtered in the end, so I certainly hope it isn't. That I spent a lot of time thinking about all of this despite the near-constant stimuli thrown at me by *Seventh Son* is not particularly a testament to its success as a movie. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Basil Iwanyk Thomas Tull Lionel Wigram	Michael Kahn Production Designer Dante Ferretti	Trixter Film Stunt Co-ordinator Paul Jennings	Production Services Tax Credit With the participation of the Canadian Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit	Alicia Vikander Alice	Strix Zahf Parod Virahadra
Screenplay Charles Leavitt Steven Knight	Music Marco Beltrami	©Legendary Pictures Productions, LLC	Executive Producers Jon Jashni Brent O'Connor Alysia Cotter	Antje Traue Bony Lizzie	Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour [2.35:1]
Production Sound Mixer Chris Duesterdiek	Costume Designer Jacqueline West	Production Companies A Universal release Presented with Legendary Pictures, of a Thunder Road Film/ Wigram production in association with China Film Co	Visual Effects Designed by John Dykstra Visual Effects by Rhythm & Hues Studios MPC Rising Sun Pictures Method Studios	John DeSantis Tusk	Some screenings presented in 3D
Visual Effects Designed by John Dykstra Visual Effects by Rhythm & Hues Studios MPC Rising Sun Pictures Method Studios	Director of Photography Newton Thomas Sigel	With the participation of the Province of British Columbia	Cast Jeff Bridges Master John Gregory Ben Barnes Tom Ward Julianne Moore Mother Malkin	Harington, Kit Mr Bradley Djimon Hounsou Radu Gerard Plunkett inquisitor Jason Scott Lee Urag Kandysse McClure Sarikin Luc Roderique	Distributor Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
Edited by Paul Rubell Jim Page					

In a medieval-style land, powerful witch Mother Malkin is sealed in a cave by Master Gregory, a 'Spook' who battles evil spirits.

Ten years later, Mother Malkin escapes and, after locating Master Gregory, kills his apprentice in a skirmish. Gregory finds a replacement apprentice named Tom, a seventh son of a seventh son, and begins to train him. Tom rescues a girl, Alice, from a mob threatening to burn her as a witch. In fact Alice is a half-witch, the daughter of Bony Lizzie, who is the sister of Mother Malkin – together the sisters are presiding over a gathering of their brethren in anticipation of the rising of the next blood moon, which will grant them unchecked power. Master

Gregory, Tom and ogre-like assistant Tusk travel to Mother Malkin's stronghold, though Tom's lack of a killer instinct when confronted with a warlock, as well as his tenderness for the untrustworthy Alice, makes Master Gregory doubt his new assistant's mettle. Tom discovers that he is the son of a witch, and that a keepsake from his mother is an enchanted amulet. Alice, doing Bony Lizzie's bidding, steals the amulet, and unwittingly leads Tom into an ambush in which Master Gregory is captured. Tom and Tusk arrive at Mother Malkin's lair, and with Master Gregory and Alice, now rebelling against her people, they rout the forces of darkness. Master Gregory passes his Spook practice on to Tom.

The Signal

USA 2014
Director: William Eubank
Certificate 15 96m 55s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

It's worth comparing *The Signal*, a science-fiction/paranoia piece budgeted at \$4 million, with another new cost-conscious science-fiction film, *Project Almanac*, which cost about three times as much. Whereas the latter is chronically derivative and anonymous, *The Signal* is far more ambitious. It's a mood piece about being imprisoned, disorientated and manipulated, respecting the genre's ability to puzzle and disturb. For long stretches, it's the more compelling film. Yet *Project Almanac* is the more likely to have audiences leaving with a sense of low-grade satisfaction, while *The Signal* will probably have them groaning that they've wasted their time as the end credits roll.

Directed by William Eubank, whose first film *Love* (2011) had a science-fiction theme (and played at Sci-Fi-London), *The Signal* starts with three university students driving across America. One of them (Beau Knapp) is a spare wheel, while the main story is between Haley (British actress Olivia Cooke) and her boyfriend Nic (Brenton Thwaites), who's suffering from the early onset of muscular dystrophy. Unfortunately, this interesting set-up is soon dispensed with, except to provide a functional motivation for Nic in what follows.

The students are lured into the Nevada desert in pursuit of an online troll who's been harassing them. They end up having a violent alien encounter. Again, this is treated by the film as a utilitarian plot point; however, the idea that aliens might make contact anonymously through the net, hiding unnoticed among the online kooks, fantasists and conspiracy theorists, is appealing.

The film then focuses on Nic, who's imprisoned in what seems to be a secret research facility. The close encounter has done something terrible to his legs, while he's annoyingly interrogated by a contamination-suited Laurence Fishburne in the riddling manner of the actor's Morpheus character in *The Matrix* (1999). Here and elsewhere, the film works best as an evocation of a bad dream. There are



Daddy strong legs: Laurence Fishburne

the confined spaces of the research facility; the shots framed with a self-conscious artfulness (such as a car driving straight at a looming storm); the heavy-handed symbolic motifs (Nic has a recurring memory of an uncrossable river); and the mad-seeming strangers (an entertaining turn from Lin Shaye from the *Insidious* films).

The frustrations are drawn out for protagonist and audience alike, and resolved in blithely unconvincing ways. Eventually, the calm lack of logic of Nic's captors starts to feel reasonable, and this unreality lingers as the film returns to the bleached desert. The shoot-out finale, full of laughably portentous slow-motion and blackouts, seems designed to lose even the most patient viewers; more hackneyed still are the cheapjack revelations in the final scene. Older viewers will think of the *Twilight Zone* TV series (1959-64); youngsters will think of its 21st-century parasite, the oeuvre of M. Night Shyamalan. Both sides will agree, though, that it's the kind of ending that just doesn't work any more. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Brian Kavanaugh-Jones Tyler Davidson	David Lanzenberg Film Editor Brian Berdan	Dorotka Sapinska @Signal Film Group LLC
Written by William Eubank Carlyle Eubank David Frigerio	Production Designer Meghan Rogers	Production Companies Focus Features presents in association with Low Spark Films/IM Global
Director of Photography	Music Nima Fakhrara	
	Sound Mixer Rodney Gurule	
	Costume Designer	

US, the present. MIT student Nic is driving his girlfriend Haley to California, along with their friend Jonah. Nic, who suffers from muscular dystrophy, is distancing himself from Haley, to her distress. They receive taunting messages from a hacker called 'Nomad'.

Nic and Jonah trace Nomad's signal to Nevada, which is on their route, and detour to find the hacker. They reach a house that appears to be abandoned, but something attacks Haley. Nic blacks out, waking in a science facility. He's questioned by Dr Damon, who wears a contamination suit. Damon claims that the students have had an extraterrestrial encounter. Nic sees a comatose Haley, and is shocked to find that his legs have been replaced by strange-looking prostheses. He also seems to hear Jonah's voice through

the walls, though Damon insists it's an illusion.

Nic escapes with the awakening Haley, fleeing into the desert. However, the locals seem menacing or deranged, and a deep gorge cuts off their escape. Nic finds that his new legs let him run at fantastic speeds. He and Haley find Jonah (whose hands have been transformed much like Nic's legs) but they are cornered by Damon and his security staff. Jonah sacrifices himself. Haley is captured and taken away by helicopter.

Damon reveals that he's Nomad ('Damon' backwards), and that he was responsible for 'enhancing' Nic. Damon is an alien or android. Nic races for freedom at super-speed, only to punch through a glass window. The desert setting is a fake; he and his friends have been abducted by aliens and are trapped on a huge craft in outer space.

Sixteen

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Rob Brown
Certificate 15 79m 6s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Made on a minuscule budget partly raised by online crowdfunding, writer-director Rob Brown's feature debut proves rather more engrossing than its generic-looking marketing stills and 'urban thriller' pigeonhole might suggest. While it delivers plenty of suspense and the occasional shock, it's primarily a psychological study of a severely traumatised teenager, and has much in common with *Boy A* (2007), the riff on the James Bulger killing that gave Andrew Garfield an early leading role. Whether Roger Jean Nsengiyumva will follow in Garfield's footsteps remains to be seen, but he proves more than capable of holding the attention in a challenging part that requires him not merely to be on screen for much of the running time but also to say very little.

Nsengiyumva's character Jumah is about to turn 16 and has just been given a final warning at school for yet another violent altercation. It's understandable why many might view him as a stereotypical thug, but as the script gradually drip-feeds the full details of his past as a Congolese child soldier brought over to the UK by aid worker Laura (Rachael Stirling), it establishes a firm distinction between Jumah and his friend Alex (Deon Williams). Mouthy to a fault, Alex is a would-be hard nut, while Jumah is very much the real thing – and not through choice.

The film's budget presumably ruled out flashbacks to anything beyond the previous few hours, but when at various stages Jumah witnesses a murder, threatens one of its perpetrators with a broken bottle and holds a gun to another's head, we can be certain that he's seen and experienced far worse. In particular, he has the physical evidence in the form of letters carved into his chest, something he's understandably hesitant to reveal to his girlfriend Chloe (Rosie Day) – and he has



Boy soldier: Roger Jean Nsengiyumva

equal difficulty in coping with her evident sympathy, expecting his admission that he wants to become a barber to be greeted with the usual derision. The mid-point scene where she lets him cut her hair offers a rare moment of genuine tenderness, offset by a far darker lovemaking scene that suggests Jumah's only previous sexual experiences involved coercion (whether as witness or unwilling participant). His unequivocal mistrust of authority figures is similarly all too understandable, even if they come in the friendly form of Detective Inspector Iqbal (Alexis Zegerman).

The film has a polish that belies its resources, and Brown's direction takes a leaf out of the late Alan Clarke's book in realising that the way people walk can often be as expressive as the way they talk (or, in the normally taciturn Jumah's case, considerably more so). There are occasional plot implausibilities, and Brown's evident determination to keep things moving sometimes works against the potential impact of the quieter moments. But if *Sixteen* is more promising than fully achieved, the promise is very much there. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jack Hume
Nic Jeune
Written by
Rob Brown
Director of Photography
Justin Shaw Brown
Editor
Barry Moen
Production Designer
Jonathan Brann
Music
John Bowen
Production Sound Mixer
Matthew Weeks
Wardrobe Supervisor
Susannah Brough

©Seize Films
Production

Company
Seize Films present
a film by Rob Brown
A Seize Films
production
Executive Producer
Celia Jeune

Cast
Roger Jean
Nsengiyumva
Jumah
Rachael Stirling
Laura
Rosie Day
Chloe
Fady Elsayed
Josh
Sam Spruell
Liam
Alexis Zegerman
DI Iqbal
Christopher

Simpson
headmaster

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Seize Films

London, the present. Teenagers Jumah and Alex witness classmate Josh stabbing local landlord Gerry to death following his eviction of drug dealer Liam. The next day, Liam tries to persuade Jumah that Gerry had molested Josh's sister. Jumah isn't fooled but turns a blind eye. He invites his girlfriend Chloe to his home; after preparing dinner, his adoptive mother Laura tactfully leaves them alone. Jumah talks about his ambition to become a barber, and cuts Chloe's hair. He hesitates to show her the scars carved into his chest (a legacy of a violent Congolese childhood), and Chloe is unnerved by the way he holds her when they try to make love. When he has a nightmare and thrashes out, he accidentally punches her and she leaves. The following day, Laura receives a distressing phone call. Spotting Alex leaving Liam's house, Jumah follows him and watches him conceal a gun. At school, he sees Chloe talking to Josh and dares him to carry out another stabbing. This is witnessed by the headteacher, who calls the police, but Jumah refuses to give a statement. Jumah attends a hairdressing open day but is patronised by the instructor. Laura admits that the phone call concerned the death of Jumah's birth mother. After an arson attack, Jumah retrieves the gun and terrorises Liam and Josh before leaving them to the police. Jumah tells Laura that he refuses to be a soldier any more. Spotting Chloe in the supermarket, he goes to speak to her.

Something Must Break

Sweden/Denmark/ 2014

Director: Ester Martin Bergsmark

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

Something Must Break is the second collaboration between Ester Martin Bergsmark and Eli Levén, after Bergsmark's documentary *She Male Snails* (2012), which unfolded through intimate conversations about gender fluidity between the filmmaker and novelist Levén, both of whom identify as trans*. Bergsmark's first venture into fiction, *Something Must Break* is based on Levén's semi-autobiographical novel *Du är rötterna som sover vid mina fötter och håller jorden på plats* ('You Are the Roots That Sleep at My Feet and Keep the Soil in Place') and continues the documentary's exploration of the rich and uncharted spaces between genders, with a powerful emphasis on desire.

Levén's novel returns repeatedly to a painting of St Sebastian, avatar of the protagonist who cruises for submissive experiences in Stockholm's toilets, parks and bars. As he tells his roommate Lea, Sebastian is harbouring a persona called Ellie whose emergence he both desires and fears. Lea, a down-to-earth and earthy lesbian, encourages him to take his time but slowly disappears into her own relationship. This leaves Sebastian/Ellie to the mercies of new straight-identified boyfriend Andreas, who also both desires and fears Ellie's coming into being. The film's melodramatic, abstract voiceover by Sebastian/Ellie speaks of disappearance and erasure, implying the possibility of suicide or murder as much as transition.

Saga Becker plays Sebastian/Ellie as barely there; slender, long-haired, pale-skinned, pensive and inward-looking, vibrating with anxiety and a hunger that is answered by Iggy Malmberg's explosive, kinetic energy as Andreas, Sebastian/Ellie's knight in shining leather. Living in a bare room and drinking to unconsciousness, Andreas initially seems as street as Joy Division, from one of whose B-sides the film takes its title, but towards the end we meet his middle-class friends and family. Through a couple of Lukas Moodysson-esque set pieces of observational drama, we realise that he is performing towards a new identity just as much Sebastian is. Performance artist Malmberg channels Sadie Benning channelling bad-boy pin-ups such as Marlon Brando and James Dean, a cismale drag king knowingly trying on the archetype.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Anna-Maria Kantarius
Screenplay
Eli Leven
Ester Martin
Bergsmark
Based on *Du är rötterna som sover vid mina fötter och håller jorden på plats* by Eli Leven
Director of Photography

Lisabi Fridell
Minka Jakerson
Editors
Ester Martin
Bergsmark
Andreas Nilsson
Marlene Billie
Andreasen
Hanna Storbj
Production Designer
Elin Magnusson
Sound Designer
Jess Wolfsberg

Costume Designer
Erik Annerborn

©Garagefilm
Rights AB
Production Companies
Garagefilm
International AB
in co-production with Film i Väst
With the support of Svenska

Filminstitutet/
Filmkonsulent
and in co-operation with SVT, Ljud & Bildmedia, Tonemestrene, Filmbasen, Talangprogrammet and Filmresidens Subtopia
Executive Producers
Rebecka Lafrenz
Mimmi Spang

Cast
Saga Becker
Sebastian, Ellie
Iggy Malmberg
Andreas
Shima Niavarani
Lea
Mattias Ahlen
Mattias

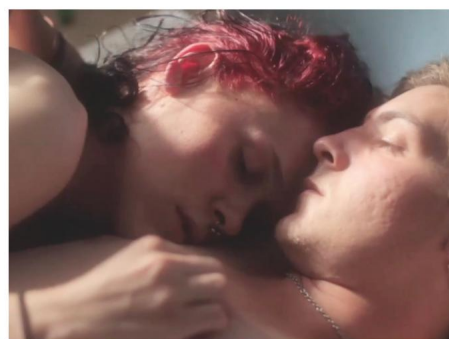
In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Network Releasing

Swedish
theatrical title
Nanting maste ga sonder

Stockholm, the present. Sebastian works in a dull warehouse, shares a flat with friendly Lea, and cruises the parks, bars and toilets of Stockholm. Sebastian's gender identity is shifting and fluid, with an emerging, clearly defined feminine persona named Ellie. Sebastian is saved from a beating in a public toilet by the leather-jacketed Andreas,

and instantly falls in love. Andreas, moody and punk, is intrigued by Sebastian/Ellie but identifies as straight. Offering unpredictable affection and occasional violence, Andreas pushes Sebastian towards living as Ellie. After a confrontation with Andreas's middle-class friends and family, Ellie emerges, for herself, into the dawn.



Unknown pleasures: Iggy Malmberg, Saga Becker

Andreas's on-off romance with Sebastian/Ellie has the nerve-jangling, transformative qualities of Joy Division's sound: a whirl of beer thefts, shopping-trolley dancing, club pick-ups. There are strong echoes of *My Own Private Idaho* (1991) in the delirious sexual tableaux. Scenes composed to a well-chosen soundtrack risk the feeling of a string of music videos, but while the girl-meets-boy storytelling is always capable, it is the impressionistic details that linger in the memory. Whether it's Sebastian/Ellie and Lea chatting in their cosy kitchen, or the lovers uniting skin-to-skin in a rubbish-strewn, reedy river, there is a sensuality and embodied presence that spreads from Sebastian/Ellie's exploration of their physical being across the whole film, however emotionally bleak a given scene may be.

This is at its height in the cool, calm framing and lighting of the central sex scene, which is at once visceral and witty, its power dynamics as defining of Sebastian/Ellie and Andreas as any of their conversations, its confidence a sign of Bergsmark's filmmaking prowess and interests. As a contributor to *Dirty Diaries*, Mia Engberg's feminist porn compendium, Bergsmark is part of a new wave of explicit cinema in Sweden that is feminist, trans-positive and highly politicised.

While *Something Must Break* is a romance and its most memorable scenes are those in the mood for love, there is also, as in Gus Van Sant's *Mala Noche* (1986), a sense of connection between sexual and economic outlaw cultures. When Ellie walks away from Andreas, we understand that it is not she but a society that demands gender conformity that is broken, and must break. **S**

The Spongebob Movie Sponge out of Water

Director: Paul Tibbitt
Certificate U 92m 26s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The second big-screen outing for SpongeBob SquarePants, the pop-eyed sea sponge with an eternally sunny disposition who's the star of a long-running television cartoon, *Sponge out of Water* is about as inessential as it comes, but it benefits from comparison with the previews for other kiddie fare that precede it at the cinema. The bulk of *Sponge out of Water* is traditional cel animation, retaining the charm of the simple line – exactly none of which is evident in the trailer for a CGI *Peanuts Movie* “from the Imagination of Charles Schultz”, which of course turns Snoopy's Sopwith Camel rides into an amusement-park attraction – and is endearing precisely because it doesn't seek to overwhelm with tilt-a-whirl, loop-the-loop razzle-dazzle. Instead it sticks to the corny punchlines, sight gags and running bits (mispronouncing ‘team’ as ‘T-M’, for example) driven 20,000 leagues into the ground.

When the recipe for the Krabby Patty, the dietary staple of the undersea town of Bikini Bottom, goes missing, the populace descend into anarchy in the blink of an eye, and director Paul Tibbitt and his team have some good fun with the tropes of movie Armageddon: rioters inexplicably take to pounding discarded tyres with makeshift weapons, and when everyone puts on their Mad Max togs, SpongeBob's friend Patrick (Bill Fagerbakke), a dim-bulb starfish, opts for a chest-protector and a ball-peen hammer taped to his head. (One standout line: “The post-apocalypse is almost over.”)

Throughout all of this, SpongeBob (voiced by *Mr. Show's* Tom Kenny) retains his unfailing optimism, the reason for which we come to understand when nemesis Plankton (Mr. Lawrence) wriggles inside SpongeBob's brain and discovers a candy landscape where anthropomorphic cupcakes play patty cake. This is one of the film's several detours into worlds-within-its-world, including a visit to an omnipotent dolphin named Bubbles (Matt Berry) living outside of space-time, which manages



Dramatic pores: *The Spongebob Movie*

to evoke simultaneously ‘seapunk’ imagery, Douglas Adams and *The Phantom Tollbooth*.

So it's smooth sailing, until the animated, underwater portion of the movie merges with the live-action section, limited for the first hour to occasional cutaways to a pirate named Burger-Beard and his coterie of talking seagulls. Burger-Beard is played by a frantically mugging Antonio Banderas who, with this and a similarly rubber-faced turn in *The Expendables 3*, has entered the strangest phase of one of the strangest career trajectories in recent cinema. In order to oppose a flesh-and-blood opponent, SpongeBob and his chums have to – what else? – transform into CGI renditions of themselves, with superhero powers to boot. The film's live-action/CGI climax, handled by *Shrek Forever After* director Mike Mitchell, is a wholly charmless spending spree meant to establish the movie-ness of *Sponge out of Water* by transforming it from a homely and funny feature version of a homely and funny cartoon into a very, very bad SFX comedy. Luckily the film has goodwill as well as budget to burn, and the damage is not quite irreparable. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Live Action Direction

Mike Mitchell
Produced by
Paul Tibbitt
Mary Parent
Screenplay
Glenn Berger
Jonathan Aibel
Paul Tibbitt
Story
Stephen Hillenburg
Paul Tibbitt
Based on the

series *SpongeBob Squarepants* created by Stephen Hillenburg
Director of Photography
Phil Meheux
Editor
David Ian Salter
Production Designer
Luke Freeborn
Music
John Debney

Sound Designer
Tim Chau
Costume Designer
Roland Sanchez

Production Companies
Paramount Pictures and Nickelodeon Movies present a United Plankton Pictures production

Executive Producers
Stephen Hillenburg
Cale Boyter

Voice Cast
Antonio Banderas
Burger-Beard
Tom Kenny
SpongeBob
Squarepants
Clancy Brown
Mr Krabs

Rodger Bumpass
Squidward
Bill Fagerbakke
Patrick Star
Carolyn Lawrence
Sandy Cheeks
Mr. Lawrence
Plankton
Matt Berry
Bubbles the dolphin
Jill Talley
Karen

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS In Colour [1.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Paramount Pictures UK

Burger-Beard, a pirate, obtains a magical book telling the story of Bikini Bottom, a town beneath the waves, and reads it to his seagull associates.

Plankton, proprietor of the Chum Bucket, launches an attack on rival restaurant the Krusty Krab, which is defended by fry cook SpongeBob SquarePants. Plankton intends to steal the recipe for the restaurant's signature Krabby Patty, but while he struggles with SpongeBob, the recipe disappears. Almost immediately Bikini Bottom, suffering from Krabby Patty withdrawal, sinks into anarchy. SpongeBob and Plankton, hunted by an angry mob who blame them for the recipe's disappearance, decide to team up to recover it. Plankton devises a time machine that will transport them back to the moment

before the recipe's disappearance, but the plan, after several detours, fails. Once again in the hands of the mob, SpongeBob offers himself up as a sacrifice to appease the angry gods, but just before his execution he smells a Krabby Patty in the distance and sets off to find the source. The smell is coming from inland. With the help of Bubbles, a dolphin, SpongeBob and his friends become amphibious and venture on to the land. They discover that the Krabby Patty recipe was stolen by Burger-Beard using the magical tome, which allows him to ‘write’ the movie we're watching. Stealing a page from the magic book, SpongeBob gives himself and his friends superpowers, which they use to defeat Burger-Beard and bring the Krabby Patty back to Bikini Bottom.

Suite française

United Kingdom/France/Canada/Belgium/USA 2014
Director: Saul Dibb
Certificate 15 107m 21s

See The Industry, page 12

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Adapted from the bestselling novel by Irène Némirovsky – published more than 60 years after her death at Auschwitz, aged 39 – *Suite française*, directed by Saul Dibb (*The Duchess*), falls between two stools. Stymied by solemn commitment to its author and, less judiciously, to the book's tributary characters, the film – shot on location in France and Belgium in warm, torpidly attractive tones – would be both forbidden love story and panoramic, realist *comédie humaine*, set during the German occupation of France in the early years of the war.

An irksomely univocal narration by the central character Lucile makes hay with her interior life within the opening minutes, making unmistakable her compromised conjugal status and clearing the way for the impending extramarital romance. Having married a wealthy husband at the outbreak of war to pacify her dying father, Lucile has a ring but no relationship – her husband has gone into the army, and she into the custody of her uptight landowning mother-in-law Madame Angellier. When a German battalion moves into the (fictional) village of Bussy and a German officer takes up residence at the grand Angellier mansion, Lucile's emotional availability has been made so explicit that a love affair is as foreseeable as sun-up.

The tediously typical casting of British actor Kristin Scott-Thomas as forbidding *belle-mère* serves as a crib for the predictability of the narrative *in toto* by similarly foreclosing any speculation as to the arc of her ancillary character. Scott-Thomas plays her hallmark costive sophisticate who softens over time, a part she commodified and copyrighted with *Four Weddings and a Funeral* in 1994.

The film's open-and-shut narration persists in making long strides into the protagonist's interiority. This voids the tension necessary to stimulate interest in the romantic storyline and denudes the Lucile character, refusing the ordinarily excellent Michelle Williams the opportunity to construe the – in theory – rich equivocality of a French civilian sleeping with the enemy. Williams, who has made a speciality of playing complex modern women in *Wendy and Lucy* (2008), *Blue Valentine* (2010) and *Take This Waltz* (2011), is thoroughly wasted here as the meek and mild Lucile.

Suite française takes its title from a composition written for Lucile by her innamorato officer, yet it fights to find space for the musical theme that should, surely, predominate. This dilution is symptomatic of the film's split personality. How much is *Suite française* a historical



Regimental music: *Suite française*

◀ drama about the moral ambiguities of German-occupied French society, and how much a taboo love story – a work of ‘women’s fiction’ – airlifted into the context of WWII? The close attention paid to period design – realistic rather than gratuitously glamorous – thrusts the film (just) beyond the circumference of the latter. It was exposure to this corner of the moviegoing market that helped *Atonement* (2007) become a contemporary classic.

Though sharing certain elements, *Suite française* cannot compete with *Atonement*’s wartime romance, lacking the narrative propulsion of that film’s prohibited love affair. Nor can it compete with the tragic backstory of its creator Némirovsky, which overshadows – in its personal and political complexities – this skittish genre construct. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Xavier Marchand
Romain Brémont
Michael Kuhn
Andrea Cornwell
Written by
Saul Dibb
Matt Charman
Based on Irène
Némirovsky’s novel
**Director of
Photography**
Eduard Grau
Editor
Chris Dickens
**Production
Designer**
Michael Carlin
Original Music
Rael Jones
Sound Mixer
Pierre Mertens
Costume Designer
Michael O’Connor

©Suite Distribution
Limited
**Production
Companies**
TF1 Droits
Audiovisuels and
Entertainment
One present in
association with

BBC Films and
The Weinstein
Company a TF1
Droits Audiovisuels
and Entertainment
One production in
co-production with
Scope Pictures and
with the participation
of Canal+
With support from
the Tax Shelter of
the Belgian Federal
Government
With the
participation of
Wallonia, Wallimage
Made with the
support of the
BFI’s Film Fund
Producers
Charles Layton
Christine Langan
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein
Len Blavatnik

Cast
Michelle Williams
Lucile Angellier
**Kristin Scott
Thomas**

Madame Angellier
**Matthias
Schoenaerts**
Lieutenant
Bruno von Falk
Sam Riley
Benoit Labarie
Ruth Wilson
Madeleine Labarie
Heino Ferch
Major
Tom Schilling
Lieutenant
Kurt Bonnet
Harriet Walter
Viscountess
Montmort
**Alexandra
Maria Lara**
Leah
Clare Holman
Marthe
Margot Robbie
Celine Joseph
Lambert Wilson
Viscount Montmort

**Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]**

Distributor
E1 Films

France, 1940. Lucile, whose husband is at war, lives with her landowning mother-in-law Madame Angellier in Bussy. When a German regiment moves into the village, one of its officers – composer Bruno – lodges at the Angellier house. Lieutenant Bonnet is sent to live at the farmhouse of the Angelliers’ tenant Benoit; he antagonises Benoit by flirting with his wife. Lucile learns that her husband’s unit is interned in a German labour camp. With Madame Angellier away, Bruno and Lucile spend an evening together. Lucile is upset to read among Bruno’s papers that her husband has a child by another woman. Lucile and Bruno kiss but are interrupted in their lovemaking by Madame Angellier’s return. When the poverty-stricken Benoit is caught stealing chickens by the Viscountess, she overstates the violence of their confrontation. Benoit eludes arrest and is sheltered by Lucile. Bruno is made head of the manhunt. With Benoit still missing, the Viscount is executed in retaliation. Lucile procures a travel pass from Bruno – after terminating their escalating relationship – so that she and Benoit can drive to Paris, where he will join the Resistance. Bruno composes a piece of music for Lucile, entitled ‘Suite française’. Bruno learns that Lucile will be apprehended at the checkpoint. At a confrontation at the barrier, Benoit kills a soldier and is injured in an exchange of fire with another. Bruno, arriving at the scene, helps the pair to escape.

The Tale of the Princess Kaguya

Japan 2013
Director: Takahata Isao
Certificate U 137m 23s



Bamboo band: ‘The Tale of the Princess Kaguya’

See Feature
on page 36

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Now 79 years old, Takahata Isao has been an animation director (though never an animator) for half a century. He was the co-founder of

Studio Ghibli (which made *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya*) and a colleague and mentor of Miyazaki Hayao. Takahata’s landmark works include his first feature, *The Little Norse Prince*, made long before Ghibli in 1968; a television version of *Heidi* (1974), still beloved in Japan; and the wartime tragedy *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988).

His new feature, his first for 15 years, is based on a Japanese folktale, ‘The Tale of the Bamboo

Cutter’, which dates from the tenth century and is widely known in Japan. In that respect, *Kaguya* is comparable to a Disney fairytale; the title character – a free-spirited girl who rebels against parental and social constraints – will be familiar to anyone who’s seen Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* (1989) or *Mulan* (1998). *Kaguya* also recalls Takahata’s *Heidi* and his later TV serial *Anne of Green Gables* (1979), which had similar themes. Anne’s character especially is echoed in the scenes of Kaguya’s mischievous adolescence.

Kaguya is magical but in a very matter-of-fact way. At the film’s start she emerges from a bamboo stalk like Thumbelina, a tiny princess found by an amazed peasant couple. She then

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Nishimura Yoshiaki
Screenplay
Takahata Isao
Sakaguchi Riko
Original Concept
Takahata Isao
Based on the
Japanese folktale
*The Tale of the
Bamboo Cutter*
Editing
Kojima Toshihiko
Art Director
Oga Kazuo
Music
Joe Hisaishi
Sound Designer
Asari Naoko
**Character Design/
Directing Animator**
Tanabe Osamu

©Hatake Jimusho
- GNDHDDTK
**Production
Companies**
A Studio Ghibli
production
Studio Ghibli,
Nippon Television
Network, Dentsu,
Hakuhodo DYMP,
Walt Disney Japan,
Mitsubishi, Toho
and KDDI present
Executive Producer
Seiichiro Ujicie

Voice Cast
Japanese-language
version
Asakura Aki
Princess Kaguya,
‘Li’l Bamboo’

Kora Kengo
Sutemaru
Takeo Chii
Okina, bamboo cutter
wife/narrator
Miyamoto Nobuko
Ona, bamboo cutter’s
wife/narrator
Atsuko Takahata
Lady Sagami
Tabata Tomoko
Menowarawa
Tatekawa Shinosuke
Inbe no Akita
Kamikawa Takaya
Prince Ishitsukuri
Ijuin Hikaru
Minister of Finance
Uzaki Ryudo
Minister of the Military
Nakamura
Shichinosuke
Mikado
Hashizume Isao

Minister of Culture

English-language
version
Chloë Grace Moretz
Princess Kaguya,
‘Li’l Bamboo’
Darren Criss
Sutemaru
James Caan
Okina, bamboo cutter
wife/narrator
Mary Steenburg
Ona, bamboo cutter’s
wife/narrator
Lucy Liu
Lady Sagami
Hynden Walch
Menowarawa
George Segal
Inbe no Akita
James Marsden
Prince Ishitsukuri
Beau Bridges

Prince Kuramochi
Oliver Platt
Lord Minister of
the Right Abe
Daniel Dae Kim
Great Counsellor
Otomo
John Cho
Middle Counsellor
Isonokami
Dean Cain
Mikado
Emily Bridges
Kita no Kata

**In Colour
[1.85:1]**
Released in UK in
both Japanese-
language version
with English subtitles,
and in English-
dubbed version

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

Japanese
theatrical title
**Kaguya-hime no
Monogatari**

Tenth-century Japan. Middle-aged bamboo cutter Sanuki finds a tiny girl in a bamboo stalk and takes her back to his wife. The girl transforms into an apparently normal baby, though she grows up rapidly over just a few months. She loves playing in the countryside with other children, especially a boy called Sutemaru. However, Sanuki also finds money and fine clothes in the forest, and decides that heaven wants the girl to grow up as an aristocrat. The family move into a mansion in Kyoto. The girl is trained in ladylike ways, though she often escapes to play like a normal child. She is named Kaguya by a priest, who spreads word of her beauty. Five princes seek her hand in marriage; she cleverly sends them away on impossible-seeming tasks. All fail, but Kaguya

is distraught when the youngest dies in the attempt. The emperor visits, causing Kaguya to panic and briefly vanish. Kaguya recalls her true nature. She is a being from the moon who came down to earth to experience human life, but now the moon will take her back. Her mother helps Kaguya return to the countryside, where she was happiest. She meets Sutemaru again, now an adult. They experience joy together, and fly over the country, but the meeting ends like a dream.

Back in Kyoto, a heavenly host descends and takes Kaguya, despite her parents’ pleas. She wears a robe meant to remove all memory of her human life, though as she rises to heaven she looks back tearfully at the earth.

The Voices

USA/Germany 2014
Director: Marjane Satrapi
Certificate 15 103m 30s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

French-Iranian filmmaker Marjane Satrapi is best known for the animated feature *Persepolis* (2007) and its stylised live-action follow-up *Chicken with Plums* (2011), both adapted from her own graphic novels, both co-directed with Vincent Paronnaud and both dealing in their different ways with the experience of exile from Iran. *The Voices*, Satrapi's second solo outing as director (following *The Gang of the Jotas*, 2012), is her first film to have been written entirely by someone else (Michael R. Perry, *Paranormal Activity 2*) and to have been made in the English language. Yet the theme of dislocation that dominates her other films remains to the fore here too.

The Voices starts with a strong sense of place: a roadway sign reads "Welcome to Milton, the town of industry", while on the soundtrack we hear Milton's very own (ultra-cheesy) theme song. Surrounded by woodland, Milton is a candy-coloured slice of hyperreal Americana where even the local bathroom-fixtures factory comes with pink staff overalls, office corridor conga lines and forklifts (also pink) that move crated products about in a carefully choreographed three-step. Or perhaps this is just how things seem to ever-smiling Jerry Hickfang (Ryan Reynolds), a happy-go-lucky worker in 'boxing and shipping' who also just happens to be a paranoid schizophrenic prone to delusions.

The condition is a legacy of his late mother, torn apart by having to decide whether to stay in her beloved Berlin or follow her army husband to the US. Jerry's life is full of maddening dilemmas too. He opts for pizza, burgers and other junk food, even though he keeps hearing that there are better things to eat. He is crazy about bad girl Fiona (Gemma Arterton) from accounts, even though it is clear that her colleague, the all-round good girl Lisa (Anna Kendrick), is far more into him. He knows he should take his meds, but the world becomes less shiny and fun whenever he is on them. And he can't decide whether he is more a cat person or a dog person – which is to say that when his good-natured boxer Bosco encourages him to be a "moral person" and his foul-mouthed, Scottish-accented cat Mr Whiskers urges him to just murder people instead, Jerry



Chopaholic: Ryan Reynolds

can find himself feeling very conflicted.

As with the goods that he packs and stacks, or the bodies that he chops into Tupperware containers, Jerry keeps the different aspects of his life neatly compartmentalised – though at times the underlying mess bleeds through. Most of what we see on screen derives from Jerry's frazzled perspective, through which every office banality, every restaurant outing and every murderous act is presented as an 'awesome show' pitched somewhere between Disney and disco.

In reconfiguring serial-killer thrills as campstastic fun, Satrapi offers a refreshing take on small-town psychopathy, full of postmodern ironies that subsequently replay in the mind with deeper ambiguity. After all, if Jerry can create a Scottish accent for his cat and an English accent for a decapitated head, who knows where his imagination ends? Shot entirely in Berlin locations, fictional Milton might, in all its manic dayglo inauthenticity, just be a refuge constructed by Jerry (the German) from the confines of a padded cell to stave off his loneliness (a recurrent theme) and exile from reality. A prisoner of his own mind, Jerry, along with his mother, may never even have left Berlin; but he and Satrapi have elaborated a hilariously artificial, improbably upbeat means of escape and even redemption – in a film that transcends taste and cross-dresses genre. **B**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Matthew Rhodes
Adi Shankar
Roy Lee
Spencer Silna

Written by
Michael R. Perry

Director of Photography
Maxime Alexandre

Edited by
Stéphane Roche
Production Designer
Udo Kramer

Original Music
Olivier Bernet
Sound Mixer
Martin Müller
Costume Designer
Bettina Helmi

@Serial Killer LLC
Production Companies
1984 Private Defense
Contractors presents
in association with
Panorama Media

a Mandalay Vision,
Studio Babelsberg
and Vertigo
Entertainment
production
A film by Marjane
Satrapi
A co-production
between AOM
Productions, LLC,
Dreiundzwanzigste
Babelsberg Film
GmbH, Elfte
Babelsberg Film

GmbH and ARRI Film
& TV Services GmbH
An Adi Shankar
& Spencer Silna
production in
association with
Panorama Media
With the support of
DFFF, FFA, MBB
Executive Producers
Christoph Fisser
Henning Molfenter
Elika Portnoy
Charlie Woecken

Cathy Schulman
Adam Stone
John Powers
Middleton
Douglas Saylor Jr

Cast
Ryan Reynolds
Jerry Hickfang
Gemma Arterton
Fiona
Anna Kendrick
Lisa

Jacki Weaver
Dr Warren

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Arrow Films

transforms into a more human baby, growing rapidly, sometimes in the space of a scene. Her adoptive parents – who are central to the film, in contrast to the Disney tradition – find money sent from heaven, and lift themselves and Kaguya up to the Japanese aristocracy.

This is the Heian era, as described in the 11th-century novel *The Tale of Genji*, when fine ladies had their eyebrows plucked and their teeth blackened. Both these prospects appal Kaguya, who yearns for her simple country life and peasant playmates, for the birds, fruits and insects. She longs to be an ordinary girl, even as the adults insist that she's a princess from heaven whose rightful place is in a mansion. In two different sequences, she escapes to her country home, only for these scenes to magically 'unhappen', dissolving into dreams.

The film is most obviously separated from other cartoon features by its gorgeously handmade appearance. It uses deliberately incomplete watercolours, complemented by white space. The look is less sketchy than Takahata's 1999 film *My Neighbours the Yamadas* but more stylised than the childhood scenes in his *Only Yesterday* (1991). The palpably drawn quality of *Kaguya*, if not its art style, may remind British viewers of *The Snowman* (1982). In one of the most impressionistic scenes, Kaguya flees into the wilderness, landscape and girl half-dissolving into angry dashing scribbles of movement.

But while the characters feel very simplified at times, there are scenes that put great weight on performance and subtle expressions, in a way that's nearer to the classical Disney tradition than most Japanese animation. It's evident with the teenage Kaguya, merry and anguished by turns, but also in the pomposity of her father and suitors. *Kaguya*'s character animation was led by Tanabe Osamu, and the background art was directed by Oga Kazuo, celebrated for his depiction of nature in Ghibli's *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988).

Unlike some of Takahata's films, *Kaguya* is very accessible to Western viewers, including children. Kaguya's joy in nature is captivatingly drawn, whether she's chasing a frog or playing with a kitten. In one scene, her father and a gang of peasant kids have a silly shouting contest to get the infant to answer to a name, with the kids dubbing her "Li'l Bamboo" and the foolish father bellowing "Princess"; it's hilarious in any country. A gentle voiceover helps to convey *Kaguya* to children, though the death of a minor character is a shock – he has what seems like a comical fall, which turns out to be fatal; there's also a brief but ugly scene in which a boy is beaten.

The main issue with *Kaguya* is its length. At 137 minutes, it is longer than Miyazaki's *The Wind Rises* (2013), which had an obviously epic subject. While the film is charming from its opening moments, it's a marathon of leisurely telling, especially in its mid-section, where Kaguya deals with *five* suitors. In Japan, some animated works are serialised in cinemas in episodes of 50 or 60 minutes. *Kaguya* might have been better suited to that format, though such a release would probably have been too small to justify the film's high budget. As it was, *Kaguya* fared modestly in Japanese cinemas, despite glowing international reviews and its Oscar nomination. **B**

Milton, an industrial town in the US, present day. Unknown to his co-workers at a bathroom-fixtures factory, Jerry is a paranoid schizophrenic, as was his Berlin-born mother. He has stopped taking his medication and regularly converses with his good-natured dog and foul-mouthed cat (the latter repeatedly proposing acts of homicide). After a date goes wrong with British co-worker Fiona, Jerry

accidentally kills her and chops up the body. The cat – and Fiona's head – urge him to kill more people. Jerry starts a relationship with another colleague, Lisa, but when she sees the bloody state of his home, he kills her too – and then a third co-worker, Alison. Jerry abducts his psychiatrist Dr Warren but, besieged by police, chooses to burn to death. In heaven, he dances with his parents, his victims and Jesus.

The Water Diviner

Australia/USA 2014
Director: Russell Crowe

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Besides an early crane shot showing its principal character dowsing for water in the Australian desert, there is no technical invention or ingenuity in Russell Crowe's directorial debut. But if the film is artless, there is at least consistency in Crowe's apportioning himself the lion's share of screen time, and so many close-ups as to make him seem less water diviner than Narcissus at the pool. He plays Connor, who in 1919, following his wife's suicide and a promise made at her graveside, travels to Gallipoli to bring back the remains of their three sons, presumed killed in battle four years earlier.

From the man who recently contested the dearth of roles for women in Hollywood, accusing ageing female actors of insisting they "play the ingénue", comes a part preposterously bloated with emotive and heroic opportunity. Like a schoolboy with a chemistry kit, combining without subtlety the choicest elements, Crowe awards himself three desirable role-types: the wayfarer, the romantic lead, and the action hero à la Errol Flynn. In an early establishing scene, the piety of Connor's love for his wife prior to her passing is upheld like a polythene bag of physical evidence, while we are also given confirmation of his ability to throw a punch and wield a cricket bat as a weapon. This kind of character flexibility – or farrago, depending how you look at it – can only come of the long rope of being self-directed, and Crowe has hanged himself.

Elsewhere, the waif-like Isabel Lucas is cast as a prostitute, and Olga Kurylenko as the widow-hotelier Ayshe, whose character arc is complex in so far as it's obedient to the fortunes of two men rather than one, her actions first originating in her grief for a departed husband and then in her burgeoning love for the once inimical Australian. Why their mutual attraction should look worse on her, given both are widowed and in mourning, is a conundrum too involuted to unpack here. His libido, his need of her, looks guilt-free, while her desire for him looks horny and hypocritical, lacking in probity.



That sinking feeling: Russell Crowe

Intended, rather, to wring tears, a grisly, extended flashback to the fate of Connor's boys makes a grand guignol of the Gallipoli campaign, while the very nexus of the film – Connor's uncanny second sight – is never investigated. There's barely an eyebrow raised when he correctly identifies the spot where his sons fell. And what has divining water to do with war graves, we may wonder? The section of dialogue that might have cleared this up – the culmination of a montage in which Connor, after gambolling through the streets of Constantinople with Ayshe and her young son Orhan, explains to the boy what his occupation is – cues in a heavy-handed, sentimental soundtrack, rendering his lesson inaudible. All for the best, perhaps, since to hear it might convince an audience that the two talents – exhuming water and exhuming corpses – could not possibly be connected.

Crowe's good intentions (gentle patriotism and compassion towards both the Turk and Allied sides of the campaign) are buried deep under mismanagement of tonal shifts and easiest-route storytelling. Overuse of lower thirds, for instance, indicates a lack of faith in the clarity of moving image, and a shallow future for this actor as director. ☹

When Animals Dream

Denmark/France 2014
Director: Jonas Alexander Arnby

Reviewed by Sophie Brown

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

In an isolated coastal village in Denmark, willowy teenager Marie finds herself in the throes of a physical and emotional metamorphosis – intense dreams, burgeoning body hair, fangs, heightened senses, the classic indications of a bad moon rising. Danish director Jonas Alexander Arnby's debut feature uses the tropes of lycanthropic folklore to illuminate societal norms that have persisted throughout history. Where the teen horror-comedy *Ginger Snaps* (2000) explored the fear of losing one's identity to womanhood, *When Animals Dream* elaborates on the pitfalls of being a woman facing the judgement of society.

The heavy air skulks in Marie's coastal hometown, boat bells chiming softly in the foggy landscape. Smoky hues thicken the cold sea air, suffocating the cottages and hanging over the austere shoreline – we're a long way from the Yorkshire moors of John Landis's *American Werewolf in London* (1981). Isolation permeates the cinematography, with breathtaking high-angle views of a lonely church evoking Edward Hopper's Cape Cod paintings, while the diffused light recalls fellow Danish director Thomas Vinterberg's *The Hunt* (2012) – another story of mass persecution spreading like wildfire around a community.

Early on we see Marie sitting in her underwear in a doctor's surgery, her flesh under his magnifying glass as he examines a mysterious rash. When she starts a new job at the local fish factory, her transformations intensify as she finds herself in macho, tacitly hostile territory. Colleagues size her up with smirking contempt; posters of aquatic species and calendar girls decorating the locker-room walls hint at her crisis of physical difference and the need to conform to the expectations and demands of her predatory, patriarchal environment. Her co-workers' intimidation escalates into a horrific climax – a humiliating sexual assault, thinly veiled as a prank.

At the crux of Arnby's film is an acute awareness of the historical stone-throwing, witch-hunting fury directed at women for their sexuality, and the relentless, controlling objectification of the female physique. This is the real horror: the unspoken misogyny embedded in the fabric of society that engulfs Marie in waves of public shaming. "If you leave the house like that, I can't help you any more," her despairing father cries at one point, as if the distinctive shifts in Marie's physicality are a provocation. The dynamic of misunderstanding between Marie and her father resembles the stilted father-son relationship of *Teen Wolf* (1985), yet the angst-ridden violence that ravages her body imbues the film with the darker tones of *Ginger Snaps*. Finally, just as Dawn in *Teeth* (2007) learns to harness the power of her physical deviance, so Marie lashes out at her predators – albeit with a trashy, slightly ludicrous dash of CGI.

What it means to be a 'she-wolf' here is a far cry from Danish folklore: it is the corporeal manifestation of teenage rage and the cultural fear of female sexuality. Carnal and violent, werewolves are an expression of rising animalistic desires, the empowered alter egos of their timid human counterparts.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Andrew Mason
Keith Rodger
Troy Lum

Written by

Andrew Knight

Andrew Anastasios

Director of Photography

Andrew Lesnie

Film Editor

Matt Villa

Production Designer

Christopher Kennedy

Original Score

David Hirschfelder

Sound Recordist

Guntis Sics

Costume Designer

DC Tour, EJM

Tess Schofield

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Entertainment LLC,

Network Investment

Holdings Limited,

Seven Network

(Operations) Limited

and Megiste Films

Pty Limited

Production Companies

RatPac Entertainment

& Seven Network

Australia present

in association with

Megiste Films,

DC Tour, EJM

Productions, Axphon

a Hopscotch Features,

Fear of God Films,

86 Production

Developed with

the assistance of

Film Victoria

Supported with

assistance from

Screen NSW

Hopscotch Features

acknowledges

the support of

Screen Australia's

Enterprise Program.

Executive Producers

John Collee

Andrew Knight

Andrew Anastasios

Kerry Stokes

Tim Worner

Angus Ross

James Packer

Brett Ratner

Cast

Russell Crowe

Joshua Connor

Oiga Kurylenko

Ayshe

Yilmaz Erdogan

Major Hasan

Cem Yilmaz

Sergeant Jernal

Jai Courtney

Lieutenant

Colonel Hughes

Ryan Corr

Arthur Connor, 'Art'

James Fraser

Edward Connor

Ben O'Toole

Henry Connor

Dan Wyllie

Captain Brindley

Michael Dorman

Greeves

Christopher

Sommers

Tucker

Benedict Hardie

Dawson

Jacqueline

McKenzie

Eliza

Isabel Lucas

Natalia

Damon Herriman

Father McIntyre

Robert Mammone

Colonel Demergelis

Dylan Georgiades

Orhan

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

E1 Films

In 1919, following his stricken wife's suicide, water diviner Connor leaves his home in Australia and travels to Constantinople to recover his three sons, presumed killed in the Gallipoli campaign four years earlier. Using for a base a Constantinople hotel run by the widowed Ayshe, Connor sets off for Gallipoli. Evading efforts by the British War Office to ship him home, he is assisted in his search for his sons' remains by Hasan, a Turkish major, and a unit of the Imperial War Graves Commission.

Connor locates the spot where his three boys fell, but a dig finds only two bodies – those of Edward and Henry. Back in Constantinople, Connor and Ayshe tell each other stories about their late loves. Hasan, a nationalist subversive, escorts Connor into Anatolia, where Connor is reunited with his surviving son Arthur, who is working as a painter in a village. Fleeing murderous dissidents, the two return to the hotel, where Ayshe – by sweetening his coffee – tells Connor that she loves him.



Growing pains: Sonia Suhl

Marie's father ultimately relinquishes his protective fears and accepts his daughter unconditionally, while Daniel, her conventionally handsome love interest, never wavers under external pressure. Beneath the werewolf symbolism, the fundamental message of *When Animals Dream*—of a hirsute girl being herself, and being acknowledged as beautiful—is a rare sight in teen movies, and indeed cinema 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Tine Grew Pfeiffer
Christoffer Boe
Caroline Schlüter
Bingestam
Ditte Milsted
Screenplay
Rasmus Birch
Based on an original
idea by Christoffer
Boe, Jonas Alexander
Arnby, Rasmus Birch

Director of Photography

Niels Thastum

Editor

Peter Brandt

Production Designer

Sabine Hviid

Music

Mikkel Hess

Sound Designer

Sylvester Holm

Key Costumer

Jane Marshall

Whittaker

©Alphaville Pictures
Copenhagen ApS

Production Companies

Alphaville Pictures
Copenhagen
presents a
film by Jonas
Alexander Arnby
Produced by
Alphaville Pictures
Copenhagen
With the support
of Det Danske
Filminstitut

In co-operation with
DR v/Filmklubben,
B Media Global,
Backup Media,
Nordisk Film
Production

Developed with the
support of MEDIA
Programme of the
European Union

Executive Producers

David Atlan-Jackson
Joel Thibout
Jean-Baptiste Babin
Henrik Zein

Cast

Sonia Suhl
Marie
Lars Mikkelsen
Thor
Sonja Richter
Mor
Jakob Oftebro
Daniel

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
Altitude Film
Distribution

Danish theatrical title
**Når dyrene
drømmer**

A Danish fishing village, present day. Teenager Marie lives with her father and wheelchair-bound mother. She consults the local doctor about a rash. On her first day working at the fish factory, her colleagues push her into fish waste. She befriends affable co-worker Felix and takes an interest in Daniel, but is sexually harassed in a prank. Her body continues to transform and she has bloody dreams about stealing her mother's medical files. The doctor colludes with Marie's father to control her emerging 'disease'. Marie realises that she has inherited her condition from her mother, who once killed a group of men in self-defence. Marie visits Felix, who informs her that the locals fear her as they did her mother. Marie seduces Daniel at a nightclub, and he accepts her lycanthropic traits. Returning home, Marie is physically restrained by the doctor and her father. Her mother savages the doctor and her father hides the corpse. The locals notice the doctor's absence; Marie's mother drowns later that day. Marie defiantly exhibits her werewolf attributes and is pursued by colleagues. Daniel urges her to leave with him but Marie is ambushed and bundled on to a departing boat. Daniel sneaks aboard. Marie murders her abductors, who include Felix. She awakens the next morning to find Daniel reassuring her.

Wild Tales

Argentina/Spain 2014
Director: Daríán Sziffrón
Certificate 15 121m 51s



Bride before a fall: Érica Rivas

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

Most of us have been in situations where we feel powerless and frustrated by the unfairness of it all, to a degree that we might either lose control completely or find another way to unleash our resentment. In Argentine Daríán Sziffrón's festival hit *Wild Tales*, his protagonists simply choose to explode—regardless of the consequences. The result is a funny, dark, hugely enjoyable film that made quite an impact at last year's Cannes Film Festival, despite (or perhaps because of) being such an unusual choice for the main competition: commercial, genre-oriented, a grotesque black comedy and an anthology to boot. *Wild Tales* ticks each of

those boxes but is, above all, great cinema.

Writer-director Sziffrón has admitted the influence of famous anthologies such as Spielberg's *Amazing Stories*, *New York Stories* (with its segments by Scorsese, Coppola and Woody Allen) and, in literature, J.D. Salinger's *Nine Stories*—a list to which we should probably add, given Sziffrón's background as a veteran TV director, the classics *Tales from the Crypt* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. As with the latter, Sziffrón opens his film with a short, sharp prologue, in which a group of air passengers come to a collective, and disastrous, realisation about the pilot of their plane, thus perfectly setting the tone—vertiginous, giddy, fatal—for the otherwise



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Hugo Sigman
Pedro Almodóvar
Agustín Almodóvar
Matías Mosteirín
Esther García

Written by

Daríán Sziffrón

Director of Photography

Javier Juliá

Editing

Daríán Sziffrón

Art Director

Clara Notari

Original Music

Gustavo Santaolalla

Sound Design

José Luis Díaz

Costume Designer

Ruth Fischerman

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Films/El Deseo

Production Companies

Film Factory

Entertainment,

Kramer & Sigman

Films, El Deseo

present

in co-production

with Telefe

in association

with Corner

Big Bang

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Artes Audiovisuales,
Gobierno de España,
Ministerio de
Educación Cultura
y Deporte, ICAA
Programa Ibermedia,
TVE, Canal+
Kramer & Sigman
Films and El
Deseo present
Executive Producers
Leticia Cristi
Pola Zito

Cast

Ricardo Darín
Simón
Oscar Martínez
Mauricio
Leonardo Sbaraglia
Diego Iturralde
Érica Rivas
Romina
Rita Cortese
Julieta Zylberberg
waitress
Dario Grandinetti
Salgado
María Onetto
Helena

Nancy Dupláa

Victoria
Osmar Núñez
lawyer
César Bordón
Cuenca
Diego Gentile
Ariel
María Marull
Isabel
Germán de Silva
landlord
Diego Velázquez
prosecutor
Walter Donado
Mario

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Film World

Argentinian/Spanish
theatrical title
Relatos salvajes

An anthology of stories taking place in present-day Argentina. In 'Pasternak', a group of air passengers slowly realise they have all been assembled on the same flight by the pilot, a frustrated musician who wants to take revenge on those he thinks have humiliated him and stalled his career by crashing the plane. In 'Las ratas' ('The Rats'), a mafioso running for local government is killed with rat poison by a waitress at a roadside diner, in revenge for his past abuse of her family, which ultimately caused her father's suicide. 'El más fuerte' ('The Strongest One') tells the story of a road-rage incident that escalates into a car chase in which the drivers—a businessman and a working-class man—end up killing each other. 'Bombita' ('Little Bomb') relates how an explosives

specialist has his car repeatedly towed away unfairly; after his attempts to fight back cause him to lose his job, his marriage and custody of his daughter, he finally blows up his own car and is sent to prison. In 'La propuesta' ('The Proposal'), a millionaire tries to get his son off the hook after he kills a pregnant woman in a hit-and-run incident by paying the gardener to take the blame; the latter is shot dead by the dead woman's husband. 'Hasta que la muerte nos separe' ('Till Death Do Us Part') is the story of a bride who, realising at her wedding that her fiancé has been cheating on her with a work colleague, takes matters into her own hands, crashing the other woman into a mirror; as the guests start to leave the party, the newlyweds have wild sex on the cake table.

independent five wild tales that follow. And despite their different genre trappings – road movie, melodrama, thriller – the stories also share Javier Julia's striking cinematography and Gustavo Santaolalla's equally excellent soundtrack, not to mention an altogether superb line-up of Argentine actors. Leonardo Sbaraglia (star of *Intacto*) plays the hot-headed businessman involved in a rapidly escalating road-rage incident in 'El más fuerte' ('The Strongest One'); María Onetto (star of Lucrecia Martel's *The Headless Woman*) plays the watchful wife whose husband tries to buy their son out of his responsibility for a fatal car accident in 'La propuesta' ('The Proposal'); and Ricardo Darín (*Nine Queens*, *The Secret in Their Eyes*) is a man who slowly but surely loses everything trying to fight the system, after his car is unfairly towed away several times, in 'Bombita' ('Little Bomb').

That the co-producer of *Wild Tales* is Pedro Almodóvar's company El Deseo won't come as a surprise, since the film displays a politically charged variation of the grotesque that feels particularly Spanish and Goya-esque in flavour, familiar from the filmographies of Luis García Berlanga and, more recently, Alex de la Iglesia and of course Almodóvar himself. The humour of *Wild Tales* is pitch-black, its irony razor-sharp, its sarcasm painfully perverse and its unpredictability ludicrous, violent but also biting funny, building a sense of the absurd in which everyday incidents can rapidly escalate into full-blown consequences without stretching our credulity. In fact, much of the pleasure of *Wild Tales* lies in watching a group of characters caught up in situations we can all relate to, pushed beyond their limits and into the realm of primal responses.

Underlying every exaggerated action and reaction is a desire to break free from what Sziffrón refers to as the "capitalist cage", an imprisonment that is mainly a threat to middle-class aspirations and status to judge by the protagonists here. The emphasis is squarely on a society dominated by selfishness, injustice, betrayal, corruption and materialism – but thanks to Sziffrón's light touch, the overall effect, though darkly excessive, is always kept crisp and fresh in tone. Each morsel of well-rounded, perfectly structured storytelling becomes part of a coherent, exuberant whole, linked as much as anything by a potent political anger directed against inequality and abuse, be it emotional, physical or economic.

Our exit from this dog-eat-dog universe comes courtesy of the exhilarating 'Hasta que la muerte nos separe' ('Till Death Do Us Part'), which thrusts us into the midst of a volatile wedding reception that vividly descends into chaos, revealing in the process just how thin the membrane of social and familial convention can be. Just before the official 'waltz', the bride discovers that the groom is having an affair with one of his colleagues, also a guest. Distress and a sexual epiphany ensue, paving the way for a dizzying payback in which the bride's whiplash response not only perfectly encapsulates the forms of cathartic vengeance and destruction that all the characters in these stories reach for, but also colourfully displays the film's most attractive trait – what Sziffrón calls "the undeniable pleasure of losing control".

X + Y

United Kingdom/Taiwan 2014
Director: Morgan Matthews

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Maths and science – and the afflictions of the extraordinarily gifted – are having something of a moment this season, as *The Imitation Game* and *The Theory of Everything* celebrate the exceptional outsider. *X+Y*, a quietly charming character study of an autistic teen maths prodigy, fluent in algebra but emotionally dumbstruck, is a thoughtful junior addition to this strand. Pleasingly, it's not afraid to put chalk-and-talk maths on screen – one key turning point is an elegant blackboard solution made comprehensible to the most number-shy viewer.

Director Morgan Matthews has based the drama closely on his 2007 BBC documentary *Beautiful Young Minds*, which passed a beady but compassionate eye over teens vying for places in the UK squad for the International Mathematical Olympiad. So closely, in fact, that several of the plot strands and even the odd line of dialogue are lifted from the documentary, leading to a slight sense of déjà vu for those who've experienced both. But here, alongside a pleasing, low-key naturalism, he and screenwriter James Graham use hero Nathan's passion for maths as a formal but not obtrusive dramatic structure. The symmetrical narrative, in which mother-and-son and teacher-and-pupil problem relationships must be solved, and a pair of romances balanced, is neat but not formulaic. Still, the film's feel is warmer than this tidy approach might suggest. It's a gentle coming-of-age tale, but one as invested in the scrappy, second-chance romance between Nathan's mother Julie and self-destructive MS-suffering maths tutor Martin as it is in Nathan's blossoming relationship with Chinese opponent Zhang Mei at a training camp in Taiwan.

Periodically things do feel a little overstuffed for such a slender framework. Determined to pack in everything from first love to the sports-movie tensions of the battle for an Olympiad place, nonetheless it never becomes *The Karate Kid* of calculus. A detour where Martin resorts to weed



Sum kind of loving: Asa Butterfield, Rafe Spall

and weary cynicism to treat his rapidly worsening MS seems to flirt with 'disease of the week' pathos but is rescued by Rafe Spall's self-mocking deadpan.

Where the film really scores, though, is in its close and sympathetic portrait of autism, centred on Asa Butterfield's still and carefully closed-in Nathan. Vulnerable and prickly all at once, he's so maths-centred that his takeaway prawn balls must be a prime number, and his stress-reducer is reciting the Fibonacci sequence. Utilising his sequence-hunting gaze and synaesthesia, the film's visuals make nimble patterns of everything from Taipei traffic lights to the shattered windscreen which holds Nathan rapt in the car crash that kills his father. There's also an unexpected tenderness extended to his Olympiad rival, the arrogant, fact-spraying Luke (an arrestingly brittle Jake Davies), terrified that autism means "if you're not special, you're just weird".

Despite using first love as a lever to open Nathan up to the world, the film is finally more concerned to connect Nathan with Julie, whom he has kept at arm's length after the loss of his father. This inevitably leads to an ending that plays appealingly with the dual meanings of 'loss' and 'value' but privileges emotional closure and dramatic catharsis over the realities of life with autism.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Laura Hastings-Smith
David M. Thompson
Written by
James Graham
Story
Morgan Matthews
James Graham
Inspired by the documentary
Beautiful Young Minds [2007] directed by Morgan Matthews
Director of Photography
Danny Cohen
Editor

Peter Lambert
Production Designer
Richard Bullock
Original Music
Mearl
Production Sound Mixer
David Mitchell
Costume Designer
Suzanne Cave

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Production

Companies
BBC Films and BFI present in association with Head Gear Films & Metrol Technology, Screen Yorkshire, LipSync Productions an Origin Pictures & Minnow Films production
Supported by Taipei Film Commission
Origin Pictures (X&Y Prod) Limited has been supported by the Yorkshire Content Fund

Developed in association with BBC Films
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Christine Langan
Joe Oppenheimer
Lizzie Francke
Phil Hunt
Compton Ross
Hugo Heppell
Norman Merry
Peter Hampden

Cast
Asa Butterfield
Nathan Ellis
Rafe Spall
Martin Humphreys
Sally Hawkins
Julie Ellis
Eddie Marsan
Richard Grieve
Jo Yang
Zhang Mei
Martin McCann
Michael Ellis
Jake Davies
Luke Shelton
Alex Lawther
Isaac Cooper

Alexa Davies
Rebecca Dunn
Orion Lee
Deng Laoshi
Perelle Ascott
Ben Morgan
Suraj Rattu
Pav Kamdar
Edward Baker-Close
Nathan Ellis aged nine

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Koch Media

UK, present day. Autistic and isolated teen maths prodigy Nathan is being coached by self-destructive MS sufferer Martin. Unable to connect with his mother Julie, Nathan is haunted by flashbacks of his much loved father's death in a car accident. Competing for a place in the UK team for the International Mathematical Olympiad, he is drawn to Chinese competitor Zhang Mei at a training camp in Taiwan. Unnerved by the competitive squad, his maths results are unimpressive. Julie asks Martin for advanced maths coaching, so that she can get closer to Nathan. Julie and Nathan start a relationship. Encouraged by Zhang Mei, Nathan

solves a complex maths problem brilliantly. At the final test, he just beats arrogant autistic team member Luke, who self-harms after failing. Back in the UK, Nathan is confused by his feelings for Zhang Mei. In Cambridge for the Olympiad, she spends a chaste night with him. When a jealous fellow competitor tells the organisers about this, Zhang Mei leaves the competition. Nathan has a vision of his father in the competition hall and runs off. Julie finds him, and explains mourning and his new love to him, in maths terms. Nathan cries for the first time. He and Zhang Mei go happily back to Nathan's hometown.

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Home cinema



All that jazz: Shirley Clarke's *The Connection* (1961) explores the lives of a group of bickering junkies in a Manhattan loft as they wait for their dealer to arrive

PORTRAIT OF SHIRLEY

Shirley Clarke, one of the key figures of the American avant garde, is finally gaining the attention she so richly deserves

PROJECT SHIRLEY VOLUMES 1-3

THE CONNECTION

USA 1961; Milestone Films/Region A/1 Blu-ray/DVD; 110 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: 'The Connection Home Movies', interviews, photo gallery, songs, trailer

PORTRAIT OF JASON

USA 1967; Milestone Films/Region A/1 Blu-ray/DVD; 107 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: annotated deleted scene 'The Lost Confrontation', 'Jason Before and After', 'Where's Shirley?', audio outtakes, clip from 'Underground New York', 'Butterfly', Clarke radio interview, Jason Holliday comedy album, photo reel, trailer

ORNETTE: MADE IN AMERICA

USA 1985; Milestone Films/Region A/1 Blu-ray/DVD; 78 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: 'Shirley Loves Felix', 'The Link Revisited', Clarke radio and video interviews, trailers, illustrated booklet with essay

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Shirley Clarke, born Shirley Brimberg into a wealthy Polish-Jewish immigrant family in

New York in 1919, devoted her life to creating challenging, avant-garde art, seemingly pushing back against her privileged roots. She ran away from home, married young and pursued a dance career before turning to filmmaking at a particularly fertile time for American experimental cinema. In the mid-50s she studied under dadaist Hans Richter, and later became part of a circle of Greenwich Village-based art-film pioneers that included Stan Brakhage and Maya Deren. In the early 1960s, on the eve of embarking on a feature-filmmaking career, Clarke became a co-founding member – and the sole female representative – of the 23-strong New American Cinema Group. Its rambunctious manifesto derided mainstream cinema as “running out of breath... morally corrupt, aesthetically obsolete, thematically superficial, temperamentally boring” – a set of pejoratives that Clarke spent the next 25 years combating in her kaleidoscopically varied body of work.

Why, then, does Clarke, who died in 1997 at the age of 77 following a stroke and a struggle with Alzheimer's, remain so underappreciated? There's never been a book written about her, so specifics are hard to discern, but prosaic issues surrounding the preservation of her output

following her death seem to be one stumbling block. More pointedly, *New York Times* critic Manohla Dargis has argued persuasively for reasons that intersect along gender and race lines: “If she had been a man or hadn't trained her cameras so intently at black Americans she would have likely received more attention while she was alive.” Clarke's recurring thematic focus on a hardscrabble, predominantly African-American milieu repeatedly drew the attentions of censors, placed her definitively outside the mainstream and aligned her with the classic Beat Generation trope of earnestly identifying with the ‘Other’ (see also Norman Mailer's key 1957 essay ‘The White Negro’). “I never felt that I was interesting enough,” Clarke told an interviewer in 1975, “so I used the ‘junkie’ or ‘the black man’ to express my feelings of alienation.”

That Clarke's work is now finding wider attention is largely down to a heroically sustained effort by Milestone Films – aka New Jersey-based husband-and-wife team Dennis Doros and Amy Heller. In the past few years they have dedicated much of their time to restoring and rereleasing her work theatrically, a process that has included a successful 2012 Kickstarter campaign to restore *Portrait of Jason* (1967). The project has now

reached the home-entertainment stage, and the first releases – *Portrait* plus Clarke's feature debut *The Connection* (1961) and final film *Ornette: Made in America* (1985) – have been transferred to Blu-ray and packaged with bounteous extras. A fourth instalment, entitled 'The Magic Box', is imminent, and will contain a swathe of home videos and experimental shorts, plus the documentary *Robert Frost: A Lover's Quarrel with the World* – that won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1964 but, in a turn of events sadly in keeping with Clarke's undeservedly low profile, its authorship was hotly disputed. Producer Robert Hughes assumed editing duties when Clarke was let go from the project, and Clarke was neither mentioned nor seen when Hughes received the Oscar from Debbie Reynolds at the ceremony (this palpably awkward clip is available on YouTube). The sole glaring omission in Milestone's project is 1964's *The Cool World*, a bracing Harlem-set docudrama the rights to which are owned by filmmaker Frederick Wiseman; he is, alas, yet to issue it on home video.

Even without *The Cool World*, 'Project Shirley' is a startlingly strong collection. It's not hyperbolic to suggest that *The Connection* should rank as one of the great debuts of all time, not simply for its aesthetic success and thematic complexity, but for the way it so cleanly maps out its maker's enduring obsessions, including: formal experimentation; contested authorship; homosocial interactions; jazz; addiction(s); and competing notions of 'cool'.

Based on a controversial off-Broadway play by Jack Gelber, *The Connection* boasts an ostensibly simple set-up: a group of bickering junkies – among them a permanently practising jazz quartet – loiter around a fetid Manhattan loft waiting for the eponymous 'Connection' (the man in possession of their next fix) to arrive. Clarke complicates matters by inserting into the fray a pompous white documentary director ("I'm not interested in making a Hollywood picture, I know something about Eisenstein!") and his sardonic black cameraman. A brief prologue informs us that the cameraman has cobbled together the existing footage as best he can, which leads us to speculate on what has happened to the director (just one of the film's myriad sources of tension) and suggests that Clarke was a progenitor of the 'found footage' subgenre. Filmed in gleaming monochrome, *The Connection* is an unpredictable and very funny work, further distinguished by the poise and balletic dexterity of Clarke's vision in a limited space and the stunning live jazz soundtrack, which informs the mood and comments on the action with rhythmic economy.

The wry satire of *The Connection*'s authorial play transmogrifies into something more sinister in the even more claustrophobic *Portrait of Jason*. One night, in her living room at the Chelsea Hotel, Clarke and her small crew (including *The Connection* star Carl Lee, Clarke's long-time lover) shot Jason Holliday – a gregarious, garrulous black gay hustler – for 12 hours as he drank, smoke and rapped on a variety of subjects.

The result, whittled down to 107 minutes, plays initially like a quirky performance piece, or



The outsider: Shirley Clarke

even a proto-*Big Brother* audition tape. Unleashing an incessant to-camera monologue, Jason is candid and funny about his unrestrained sex life, and frank about the realities of his identity as a gay black man in pre-Stonewall America. He also expounds on the overt racism he's faced from presumably well-meaning white liberals, although he is at times, somewhat paradoxically, guarded, aware of his 'otherness' in the presence of the mostly white filmmakers.

Proceedings take an unsettling turn when the detached approach of the filmmakers gives way to aggressive behind-camera prompting, particularly from Lee, who implores Jason to "Tell the truth, motherfucker!" In such moments we find uncomfortable echoes of *The Connection*'s onscreen director shamelessly manipulating the action to provoke a purer 'truth'. What has Jason done to deserve such hostile treatment? Are we party to a brutal public reckoning? Are they *all* in on the joke? Since the film remains excised of wider context, it's impossible to tell. The final result is a hypnotic power play, in which the irreconcilable

Her focus on the hardscrabble, predominantly African-American experience placed her outside the mainstream



Portrait of Jason (1967)

tension between process and product screeches and strains before abruptly sputtering out in a thrilling, exhausting checkmate.

Around the same time as *Portrait*, Clarke began work on a film about the experimental jazz musician Ornette Coleman – but the producers were unhappy with the rushes and fired her. More than 20 years later, when Coleman was honoured in 1983 in his native Texas, Clarke returned to complete the project using a mixture of new and old material. Like *Portrait*, *Ornette* is an idiosyncratic study of an eccentric African-American performer, but it replaces *Portrait*'s sweatily hermetic quality with an expansive outlook: it's a temporally fluid, continent-hopping study that attains a holistic transcendence without once succumbing to biographical convention. Clarke integrates impressionistic flashbacks of Coleman's youth in the segregated South (featuring actors playing child and teenage versions of him) with mosaic-like sequences of live performance, archive footage and quirkily staged, informative interviews with Coleman, music critics and bandmates, who all seem to find the subject impenetrably enigmatic.

Unlike the agitation punctuating Clarke's association with Jason, her relationship with Coleman seems harmonious, though ironically this results in some uncomfortably assaultive filmmaking. Certain sequences are edited so frenetically, semi-synchronously with Coleman's unpredictable music, that they should come with an epilepsy warning. In the second half, *Ornette*'s formal strangeness is matched by its content: there is, for instance, a passage about Nasa's request that Coleman make music for its space programme, which is augmented by charmingly ramshackle (and, back then, cutting-edge) video effects.

While *Ornette: Made in America* is not as conceptually rigorous as *The Connection*, or as endlessly compelling as *Portrait of Jason*, it is nevertheless an optimistic study of a genuine original striving to create without compromising – one can see why Clarke was so motivated to tell his story. It's now high time for Clarke to be the subject of such joyous adoration. 🍷



Ornette: Made in America (1985)

New releases

FILMS BY ROBERT ALDRICH

WORLD FOR RANSOM

USA 1954; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray; 82 minutes; 1.37:1

TEN SECONDS TO HELL

USA 1959; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray; 93 minutes; 1.66:1

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

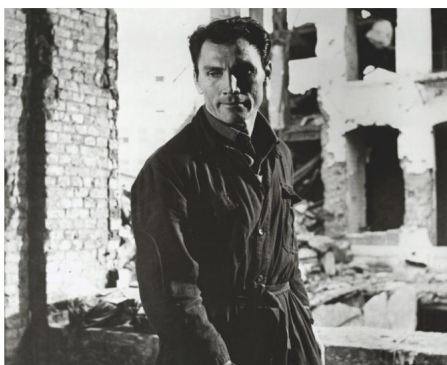
When Robert Aldrich commenced work on *World for Ransom*, he was the director of one feature, a baseball picture called *Big Leaguer*, which hadn't done much at the box office, and was knocking out episodes of *China Smith*, a television series starring Dan Duryea as an expat adventurer in Asia. Less than two years after *World for Ransom's* release, Aldrich was finishing a creative run that included *Apache*, *Vera Cruz* (both with Burt Lancaster), *Kiss Me Deadly* and *The Big Knife*. This, then, was the coiled crouch before a great leap forward.

World for Ransom was brought about through a bargain with *China Smith* producer Bernard Tabakin, who allowed Aldrich to use the show's star and crew to film a Cold War thriller on their soundstage in Singapore during a shooting break. Duryea plays Mike Callahan, an American described as a "combination of beachcomber and soldier of fortune" and the only man who can rescue a nuclear scientist kidnapped and put on sale to the highest bidder. The material has some superficial similarities to Sam Fuller's *Pickup on South Street*, released the previous year, though it is mostly of interest as a series of sketches for the movies Aldrich would soon be making himself. You can see him playing around with foreground-background tension, shooting through the bars of an iron bedstead exactly as he will on *Kiss Me Deadly*, and experimenting with inventive new set-ups: driving scenes without rear projection, down-the-gun-barrel POVs.

At the heart of *World for Ransom* is a triangular relationship between the battered idealist Callahan, an old flame who ditched him in Shanghai while he was fighting the war (Marian Carr), and the philandering husband she picked up while Callahan was away (Patric Knowles).

A similar dynamic can be found in another lesser-known Aldrich also new to Blu-ray, 1959's *Ten Seconds to Hell*. Shot in West Germany during one of Aldrich's not infrequent periods of disfavour with studio higher-ups, his first cut of the film, about a German bomb-disposal unit at work in the ruins of post-war Berlin, was shorn of nearly 40 minutes by displeased producers, which accounts for the blundering use of voiceover and erratic pacing. As in *World for Ransom* – or 1954's ripsnorting *Vera Cruz* – we have two men competing for the same woman, one of them a man of principle, the other a self-interested, mercenary cynic. Here it's Jack Palance, his taut death's head a-twitch with tormented conscience, against the fine and gone-too-soon Jeff Chandler, a feckless epicurean sipping champagne amid the rubble of civilisation. At once looking back and predicting future triumphs – the ragtag band on a WWII death-trip in *The Dirty Dozen* (1967) particularly – *Ten Seconds to Hell*, like *World for Ransom*, seems more incipient gesture than polished work, but even with one hand behind his back Le Gros Bob packs a punch.

Disc: Bare-basics packages. *World* is a sterling transfer of a heretofore hard-to-see property;



Blow-up: *Ten Seconds to Hell*

Ten Seconds is a commendable presentation of a film whose post-production mauling will, unfortunately, likely never be corrected.

ALI: FEAR EATS THE SOUL

Rainer Werner Fassbinder; Germany 1974; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 93 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: introduction by Todd Haynes, interviews with Brigitte Mira and Thea Eymész, 2002 short 'Angst isst Seele auf', 'Signs of Vigorous Life: New German Cinema' 1976 BBC documentary, scene from 'The American Soldier', essay by Chris Fujiwara

Reviewed by Alexander Jacoby

Four decades after its release, *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* remains a provocative account of interracial love, and one of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's most intense and accessible films. The drama develops with the terseness of a thesis, but the acting, especially from lead actress Brigitte Mira, gives it a poignant human focus. This release reveals the film's visual splendour: the digital restoration, supervised by original cinematographer Jürgen Jürges, makes clear a stylistic flair that belies the low budget. The vibrant colours and the inventive use of depth are vital to the film's emotional force.

The account of the prejudice faced by Muslim immigrants in post-war Germany is both specific to the 1970s and startlingly contemporary. On the one hand, Fassbinder's Arabs are decidedly secular, indulging in hard drinking and extramarital sex: the focus is more on race than religion. The setting in Munich, site of the Beer Hall Putsch and national headquarters of the Nazi party, recalls an era of state-sanctioned racism; Nazi values, Fassbinder implies, have not entirely disappeared from democratic West Germany. Yet the setting also evokes the attack by Palestinian militants on Israeli sportsmen at the 1972 Munich Olympics, an event that, we are explicitly told, has worsened relations between ethnic Germans and Arab guest workers. In showing how the actions of a few extremists become a pretext for hostility towards a minority group as a whole, the film has clear relevance today.

Disc: Extras include a 1976 *Omnibus* episode dedicated to the New German Cinema, which contains informative contributions from Werner Herzog, Volker Schlöndorff, Wim Wenders and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg. Director Todd Haynes discusses the influence of Sirk on Fassbinder and provides some sensitive close analysis of *Fear Eats the Soul* itself. Fassbinder's editor Thea Eymész and star Mira recall their work with Fassbinder; Mira, aged 93 when interviewed in 2003, reminisces about the director and her Moroccan co-star El

Hedi ben Salem with obvious affection. Mira also features in an intriguing 2002 short, *Angst isst Seele auf* (the grammatically correct version of Fassbinder's deliberately ungrammatical title), about a black actor assaulted by neo-Nazis on the way to a stage performance of *Fear Eats the Soul*. Though heavy-handed, the short, by German-Iranian filmmaker Shahbaz Noshir, not only pays tribute to Fassbinder but also shows that the issues he raised remain pertinent.

DRUM

Steve Carver; USA 1976; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray; 98 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary with Steve Carver, original theatrical trailer

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

At risk of eternal damnation, I will stand before the Gods of Cinema and swear that Richard Fleischer's *Mandingo* (1975) is a really, actually excellent movie, one of only a handful to grapple with the legacy of slavery in the United States – and I do mean grapple, as in to grab a meaty handful of the physical facts of the thing. As for *Drum*, set 15 years after the events of *Mandingo* and bringing back star Ken Norton, "*Mandingo* lit the fuse – *Drum* is the explosion!" goes the film's tagline, though it doesn't so much give off a boom as a resounding plop.

Mandingo screenwriter Norman Wexler is credited on *Drum*, but Fleischer has been replaced by perhaps the least talented of Roger Corman's discoveries, Steve Carver, who delivers a mildly apologetic commentary track. As Carver relays, he was himself replacing Burt Kennedy, tossed mid-shoot by producer Dino De Laurentiis, and this at least partially accounts for the film's wild inconsistencies in tone and texture. From the opening scenes at a New Orleans brothel operated by Isela Vega, it is evident that something is very wrong. Although the film was purportedly shot by top-flight DP Lucien Ballard, the flimsy, tacky set is indifferently bathed in a flat wash of light, with nary a touch of adumbration to be found.

Everyone involved seems to have developed their own coping mechanisms for surviving the disastrous shoot. One-time heavyweight champ Norton, playing the 'buck' slave Drum, seems visibly sullen and depressed, while Warren Oates, playing the slave breeder who buys Drum, goes full-on hick burlesque, his performance consisting of compulsive blinking and the gormless delivery of such lines as, "You ain't gonna start meddlin' around in my poontang now, is ya?" Most heartbreakingly, Yaphet Kotto, playing Drum's friend Blaise, gives a powerful, aggrieved performance, as though he believes the movie can still be saved. Nowhere in *Drum* do you really come near to understanding the reality of slavery, but watching Kotto, the plight of the black actor is very evident. **Disc:** A loving transfer of a film whose palette is tackier than whorehouse wallpaper.

THE FORTUNE

Mike Nichols; USA 1975; Twilight Time/Region A Blu-ray; 88 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: isolated music and effects track

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

News of Mike Nichols's death last November was met with grief by film culture as a whole, although, like most artists worthy of the name,

Nichols had already died professionally a few times. The most grim and seemingly permanent decease followed the release of 1975's *The Fortune*, based on a script by highly rated *Five Easy Pieces* screenwriter 'Adrien Joyce' (the nom de plume of Carole Eastman) and starring perhaps the most bankable attractions of the day, Warren Beatty and Jack Nicholson.

Beatty had used *The Fortune* as leverage to get his passion project *Shampoo* made – it was supposed to be the commercial risk while *The Fortune* was the sure thing, but it worked out the other way round. *The Fortune* lost a fortune, Nichols didn't direct another fiction feature until 1983's *Silkwood*, and it would be longer still until Joyce/Eastman had another screen credit.

Their collaboration was by most accounts an unhappy one, but the resulting antic, black-hearted comedy, uneven though it is, deserves some kind of mini cult status. Two rascallions, gigolo Nicky Wilson and weaselly pawn Oscar Sullivan (Beatty and Nicholson), set up an uneasy *ménage* with Fredrika Quintessa Bigard (Stockard Channing), the heiress to millions made in menstrual pads, in a dusty 1930s outer Los Angeles that's something like the anti-Promised Land. When they discover that they can't get to her parental wealth by killing her with kindness, they decide to just plain kill her instead. That the Coen brothers are admirers of this nasty little number should come as no great surprise.

A high tolerance for hackle-raising performances is a must going in, for the dramatis personae are bad company: Nicky is a vain, puffed-up blowhard, Oscar a priapic bozo, 'Freddie' a frowsy brat – though the glimpses that Eastman's script allows into her tomboy fantasies of independence make her a figure of some sympathy. You could call *The Fortune*



Shelley shock: *He Ran All the Way*

misogynist, misandrist or just plain anti-human and I'm not sure you'd be wrong, but its extended riff on incompetent corpse-disposal is still undeniable precision-timed comedy.

Disc: There's an isolated track for David Shire's insistently rollicking score, though the option to mute it would be preferable.

HE RAN ALL THE WAY

John Berry; USA 1951; Simply Media/Region 2

DVD; 74 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The desperation is so palpable in this noir thriller that it's surely no coincidence all its major players were cornered by the Hollywood witch-hunt. In fact, for writer Dalton Trumbo it had already started, since his script is credited on screen to industry colleagues Hugo Butler and Guy Endore, who agreed to provide a sympathetic front for a comrade who'd already fled town. Independent producer Bob Roberts would never make another Hollywood movie, director John Berry wound up in France for

decades, and leading man John Garfield was dead a year later at only 39, his heart attack reputedly brought on by the stress of the HUAC hearings.

In this last screen role, Garfield tackles an archetypal antihero, a small-time hustler coerced into a payroll heist that inevitably goes wrong, sending him on the run after he shoots a cop. After ducking into a public swimming pool, he follows Shelley Winters home, taking her working-class family hostage while figuring out his next move. The claustrophobia intensifies from there thanks to Berry's focus on anguish-racked close-ups, every worry-line captured by master cameraman James Wong Howe. We should be siding with the hostages, yet Garfield draws out the corrosive tragedy of a guy who's never had any real emotional connection to life and has unwisely sought a fast buck instead. At the same time, Winters and her folks have to confront their own capacity for violence and moral ambivalence when their cosy domestic routine is shattered. Trumbo's piercing script doesn't let any of them off easy.

Disc: A solid transfer from a surprisingly clean print.

1930S HITCHCOCK FILMS

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

Alfred Hitchcock; UK 1934; Network/Region B Blu-ray; 75 minutes; Certificate U; 1.33:1; Features: introduction by Charles Barr; image gallery, 1972 interview

YOUNG AND INNOCENT

Alfred Hitchcock; UK 1937; Network/Region B Blu-ray; 83 minutes; Certificate U; 1.33:1; Features: introduction by Charles Barr; image gallery, 'Hitchcock: The Early Years'

THE LADY VANISHES

Alfred Hitchcock; UK 1938; Network/Region B Blu-ray; 95 minutes; Certificate U; 1.33:1; Features: introduction by Charles Barr; image gallery, PDF script

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The half-dozen thrillers Hitchcock made between 1934 and 1938 established his international reputation. The last of them, *The Lady Vanishes*, won him the New York Film Critics Circle award for best director, and gave cause for the *New Republic*'s Otis Ferguson to hail the "overstuffed and delightful gentleman from London" as a "genius". With the exception of *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), British critics including this magazine's Gavin Lambert were dismayed by the "slow and laborious" American films that followed in the 1940s and early 1950s, and on the whole they were right.

The inevitable point of comparison is the first of the cycle, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), which Hitchcock remade at great length in 1956. The original has a somewhat rustly soundtrack and begins with a scene of uncharacteristic clumsiness, but soon proves itself faster, funnier, more inventive and better structured than the later version. The substitutions – a tedious scene in a taxidermist's shop for a macabre one in a backstreet dentist's – are for the worse, whereas the Albert Hall sequence is redone more or less shot for shot (and note for note) with no improvement. And the first version has an incomparably better villain in Peter Lorre, making his English-language debut.

The wrong-man thriller *Young and Innocent* (1937), lacking the espionage



The Fortune You could call it misogynist, misandrist or plain anti-human, but its extended riff on incompetent corpse disposal is undeniable precision-timed comedy

Television

VANITY FAIR

BBC; UK 1987; Simply Media/Region 2 DVD;
Certificate 12; 490 minutes; 4:3.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Thackeray's 'novel without a hero' is a tempting prospect for filmmakers. You got sex, you got wars (Napoleonic ones), you got lots of frocks and bonnets, you got a juicy part for a leading actress – Becky Sharp, sexy, clever and heartless. But no film or TV version has risen properly to the novel's capaciousness, its gleeful cynicism, or its uncomfortable mix of sensibilities: part cartoon, part relentlessly clear-sighted realism – Becky may be a villain, but in 19th-century Britain a woman who has no family, no money and an ordinary degree of ambition and sensuality has few choices. Andrew Davies's 1998 BBC adaptation had a pleasingly nasty streak, and a captivating Becky in Natasha Little. This version, a decade older, has more of a Sunday teatime feel: staid, less funny, slow to get moving; it lumbers through 16 half-hour episodes, energy sapped by Nigel Hess's blandly lush score. Like a lot of British costume dramas, it has a weakness for costume over drama – a big slice of the budget went on carriages, evidently – and the script (by the East End novelist Alexander Baron) is a bit too reverential towards the source material, keener on fidelity of incident than on fidelity of spirit.

But as the story goes on, and morality slips into more conventionally Victorian mode (more shocked by Becky's callousness, more in awe of motherhood and virtue), it starts to look much better; in particular, Eve Matheson's sparky Becky becomes more charismatic as her star rises, more plausibly calculating as her schemes fall apart. The supporting cast isn't as enjoyably stuffed with grotesques as the 1999 version, but has some nice turns, including Sian Phillips as the rich aunt everyone is desperate to please and Jack Klaff as the bluff, unscrupulous soldier Rawdon Crawley, belatedly gaining a sense of self-respect.

Disc: OK transfer of a somewhat studio-bound original. No extras.

THE RAINBOW

BBC; UK 1988; Simply Media/Region 2 DVD;
Certificate 15; 180 minutes; 4:3.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

More women and choices, in this three-part adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's 1915 novel, a predecessor to *Women in Love*: we're on the borders of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire before World War I, where sweet young Ursula Brangwen is searching for fulfilment and independence, through affairs, with women and men, and a career in teaching, none of which quite does the job. It doesn't quite do the job for the viewer, either: too tasteful. Stuart Burge's production offers instants of beauty that lapse into prettiness; the period settings have a whiff of industrial museum, and Imogen Stubbs isn't a dangerous enough presence for Ursula – you can't see her growing up into a Ken Russell heroine (she's the Jennie Linden part, not Glenda Jackson, by the way). Even when Stubbs and Martin Wrenner are making love in a pond on the South Downs, you don't swallow the idea they are being knitted into one fecund nucleus of the fluid darkness. Ursula's discovery of her



Vanity Fair The script by Alexander Baron is a bit too reverential towards the source material, keener on fidelity of incident than on fidelity of spirit

feminine strength, her flexing of muscles, seem at times less an awakening than a sulk (something rather similar was said about Sammi Davis in Russell's own film version the following year).

Disc: Filmed (I think) rather than videotaped: a wonderful crispness on my laptop that gets lost on a larger screen. No extras.

GIRLS SEASON 3

US; HBO 2014; Warner Home Video/Region 2
DVD; Certificate 15; 326 minutes; 16:9. Features:
Inside the Episodes; audio commentary.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

These days, of course, girls have all kinds of choices, but it's not clear, watching Lena Dunham's wildly acclaimed comedy, how much good this has done them. Hannah (Dunham) and her friends have all the freedoms, in sex and careers, dreamt of by Lawrence's women but seem almost as chained by social expectations as Thackeray's. Skewered by self-doubt, they're stuck in relationships that border on the abusive, in jobs that either pay badly or demand their souls, and in some old sitcom plot lines – the screwed-up sister who blows into town and wrecks everything, the funeral where the heroine meets grief with self-involvement and career anxiety. Is this knowing pastiche,

slackening of cliché control, or a revelation that, aside from its behind-the-sofa frankness about sex and selfishness, it's a conventional sitcom? Compensations for the uncertainty include Richard E. Grant as a fellow addict who has pursued Jessa (the British one) from rehab, pulling her back into her druggy ways – he does the descent from apparent serenity and wisdom into jittery narcissism very well; and there are guest spots from Patti LuPone, playing herself as a shameless publicity whore, and Louise Lasser, as an avant-garde artist.

Meanwhile, Hannah's delightful/repellent boyfriend Adam (Adam Driver), with his avant-garde sexual experimentation and emotional disengagement, has become sweet and caring and the frequent victim of her frantic narcissism: it feels like a loss. In the first ever episode, Hannah told her parents that she couldn't finish writing her memoir because she hadn't lived enough; I hope that doesn't apply to Dunham, who's still only 28, and has produced a remarkable comedy. Join me in lobbying for the enactment of Fawlty's Law, which will restrict all decent TV comedies to a maximum of 12 episodes.

Disc: Fine, but is it a good idea to have audio commentaries rip away the veneer of rawness, exposing the professionalism beneath? ☹

New releases

element, is the least typical and least known of the films from this period, but like *The 39 Steps* (1935) it is a picaresque story of the kind Hitchcock would attempt numerous times in Hollywood, culminating in a bravura travelling shot that he would reuse in *Notorious* (1946). More than in any other Hitchcock film, its fast-moving plot shows us a cross-section of British society, as it strikes a trio of outsiders.

Hitchcock's mastery of cinematic point of view was established before the advent of sound but was seldom more intense than in *The Lady Vanishes*, in which Margaret Lockwood's character has to convince a disbelieving world of something only she and the audience know – and come to question. Ironically, it was among the films in whose writing Hitchcock had least involvement, having been adapted into a screenplay by Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat from Ethel Lina White's omnisciently narrated novel before Hitchcock came on board. **Disc:** These Blu-ray restorations are a vast improvement on Network's DVDs, though the extras are identical, and a bit skimpy compared with those on Criterion's Region A discs of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *The Lady Vanishes*.

LOVE STREAMS

John Cassavetes; USA 1984; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD Dual Format; 141 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary by Michael Ventura, video essay by Sheila O'Malley, 'I'm Almost Not Crazy... John Cassavetes: The Man and His Work', new interviews with Al Ruban and Diahnne Abbott

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

The crowning achievement of John Cassavetes's embattled directorial career, *Love Streams* was for years only available in a 122-minute videotape from the mid-80s, so this full-length Criterion release, lovingly restored, contextualised and annotated, is cause for both celebration and re-evaluation. It's safe to say that the full *Love Streams* experience has never been quite so available before for viewers, but then again there's nothing really safe to say about this movie. It is unsparing in its length, in its intensity and in its commitment to finding tough moments of honesty and connection between people in the midst of haphazard behavioural chaos (look at the ungarded and psychologically acute reactions Cassavetes gets from his child actors).

Cassavetes and his wife and long-time muse Gena Rowlands play Robert and Sarah, a brother and sister linked by untidy emotions, and this feels like a touchingly appropriate end to their partnership both on screen and off (Cassavetes died in 1989). In the scene where Sarah brings a whole menagerie of animals to Robert's house, she gives new meaning to that old Nicholas Ray phrase, "It seemed like a good idea at the time."

There's a romanticism to *Love Streams* that's like a certain kind of alcoholism at the absolute end of its tether, and this is expressed most strikingly when Robert merrily hits himself in the head as he gets out of a car in Las Vegas. Rowlands, as always, grounds self-destructive impulses such as this with her own more hopeful vision of life and behaviour.

Cassavetes and Rowlands were the perfect opposites-attract artistic couple because



Now you see her...: *The Lady Vanishes*

they saw and accepted everything about each other and wanted to offer that radical exposure and balance to their audience.

Disc: An essential disc. Sheila O'Malley's very in-depth video essay about the acting style of Gena Rowlands is particularly insightful and vivid.

MAN OF THE WEST

Anthony Mann; USA 1958; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 100 minutes; Certificate 12; 2.35:1; Features: audio commentary, introduction by Douglas Pye, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Man of the West is one of those westerns, like *The Gunfighter* (1950) or *The Outlaw* (1943), that seem to aim for archetypal status right from their titles. They don't all make it – *The Outlaw* certainly doesn't, for one – but Anthony Mann's film, the last of his great run of 50s westerns, hits the target despite some obtrusive weaknesses. Mann's symbolic feeling for landscape, always a strong point, is at its most acute as his hero (Gary Cooper) travels from a bustling township through green rolling hills to barren rocky terrain around a stripped-out ghost-town – a journey into the brutal hell of his own past.

A seemingly respectable citizen, left stranded after his train is attacked by gunmen, Cooper is revealed to be a former member of the same gang, run by the borderline-deranged Dock Tobin (Lee J. Cobb, hamming outrageously), and must pretend to rejoin them in order to destroy them. Rather too nudgingly, his character is named Link (between old west and new, savagery and civilisation), and that the visibly ageing Cooper could have been adopted as a boy by Cobb (ten years his junior) strains credibility more than somewhat.

Even so, the sombre power of Mann's direction and the intensity of the relationships easily outweigh the flaws. The image of the self-lacerating family unit, with its echoes of Greek tragedy, figures strongly in Mann's westerns, never more so than here. The final showdown between Link and Claude (John Dehner), the most dangerous of his 'cousins', almost takes on the passion of a *Liebestod* ("It could have been so different," Link groans, before shooting him dead), and Dock openly invites his own death at Link's hand.

Disc: The Blu-ray transfer makes the most of Ernest Haller's widescreen cinematography. A two-person commentary, from Glenn Kenny and Farran Smith Nehme, makes for enjoyable listening without digging too deep.



Outlaw country: *Man of the West*

NIGHT WILL FALL

André Singer; UK/Germany/France/Israel/USA/Denmark 2014; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 75 minutes; 1.78:1; Features: original trailer, 'Death Mills' (Billy Wilder, 1946), 'Oscweicim' (1945), 'Belsen Death Camp Leaders Meet Justice' (1945 newsreel), 'Night Will Fall – BFI Panel Discussion' (2014), interviews (Dr Jeremy Hicks at Auschwitz; Professor Rainer Schulze at Bergen-Belsen; Professor David Cesarani at Buchenwald; Caroline Moorhead), stills gallery, essay booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

As Allied troops liberated Nazi concentration camps in April 1945, producer Sidney Bernstein and the Ministry of Information resolved to use the harrowing discoveries recorded by Allied army cameramen to create a hard-hitting film. But by October the same year, the *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey* had been quietly shelved, becoming "the lost masterpiece of British documentary cinema", in the words of its restorer Dr Toby Haggith.

Director André Singer, fascinated by the story of the film's extraordinary creation and suppression, has fashioned an exemplary history of its making to accompany its recent rebirth as an Imperial War Museum restoration. The film is devastating in its use of the original's unseen footage of the appalling atrocities of Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Auschwitz and elsewhere, and the extensive archive scenes are as horrifying as they are uncompromising. Innumerable ravaged corpses being dragged and stacked like cordwood before mass burials, lingering close-ups of human bodies staved in like discarded toys – it's both desperately hard to watch and impossible not to.

Closely woven around this irrefutable evidence of genocide are recent interviews with survivors, soldiers and cameramen, filled with haunting detail and emotion. Very much living history, these witnesses are wrapped in *Factual Survey* footage of their young selves, their current testimony reanimating everything the original camera caught. Alongside these stories runs the politically fraught tale of the documentary, hewn from a mountain of footage. John Krish, a junior editor at the time, describes seeing the Dachau rushes as "like looking into the most appalling hell possible". Despite the editorial input of Alfred Hitchcock (adding maps to point up how concentration camps serviced nearby cities), Richard Crossman's piercing narration and leading editor Stewart McAllister's efforts, it was rapidly deemed too problematic for post-war political expediency (German reconstruction, the Palestinian question)

New releases

to be released. A vivid reminder of the key role that documentary plays in bearing witness to historical outrages, and how easily it can be suppressed, *Night Will Fall* joins the film it lauds as a valuable example of what Bernstein deemed most crucial: "A lesson for all mankind."

Disc: The restored archive footage has enviable clarity, its largely silent footage subtly extended with well-chosen sound effects in the style of *The World at War*. Billy Wilder's punchy, fact-filled short *Death Mills* and the Russian *Oscweicim* (*Auschwitz*), with its affecting montage of the mountains of looted belongings, highlight quite how different the lengthy, reflective *Factual Survey* was. A string of highly detailed accounts by Holocaust historians of the liberation of various concentration camps, all shot on site, provides useful context and hefty intellectual ballast, as does the excellent, comprehensive essay booklet.

LE PLAISIR

Max Ophüls; France 1952; Gaumont/Region B Blu-ray; 97 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: Marcel Ophüls introduction, interviews with assistant director Jean Valère, interview with the film's restorers

Reviewed by David Thompson

Le Plaisir – or *House of Pleasure*, as it was translated at the time of release – is often neglected in comparison with the two features Max Ophüls completed before and after, *La Ronde* (1950) and *Madame de...* (1953). Partly this has been down to poor distribution, partly to the curse of the portmanteau film, comprising as it does adaptations of three short stories by Guy de Maupassant. But within this triptych – two shorter tales flank the longer – the film boasts an extraordinary richness in its casting (especially Danielle Darrieux and Jean Gabin) and above all in its peerless *mise en scène*, as fine as in anything in Ophüls's output.

As often with this director, narration is used as an integral part of the texture and style of the film. In the original French version it is the voice of Jean Servais, which, as Ophüls's son Marcel observes in his introduction, engages the ear with its qualities of roughness and warmth. Maupassant's overriding tone of voice was famously cynical; Ophüls amplifies this with a greater sense of regret and compassion, and a special sympathy for the women portrayed.

The first story opens at the Palais de la Danse in Montmartre, where a figure in a strange mask of youth furiously joins in the dancing, collapses and is helped home by a doctor. He is in fact an old man refusing to relinquish his past, tended to by a faithful wife who accepts his folly. The second story begins at the Maison Tellier, a town brothel frequented by local dignitaries, which unusually closes one Saturday night so that the prostitutes can journey to the countryside for the first communion of their madam's niece. And the third is the tragic tale of the love between a painter and a model that grows sour; rejection leads to a suicidal leap that results in her becoming confined to a wheelchair and his final commitment to marriage.

"Life is movement" has become acknowledged as Ophüls's credo, and in each of these stories there are fabulously eloquent examples of camera movement. In the Palais de la Danse,



Red queen: *La Reine Margot*

we float along in the frenzy with its principal character; when the doctor calls for scissors to cut away the old man's mask, a waiter is followed through the bustling hall as he searches for a pair – a brilliant digression emphasising how life stops for no one. The activities of the Maison Tellier are always observed from the outside, the camera craning around the building, picking up brief snatches of scenes; these women live in both a playground and a cage. And at the church service we follow the light to the windows and back, guided by the sculpted angels, underlining how the sacred and profane coexist in the emotion everyone experiences during the ceremony. Finally, when Simone Simon's model ascends the stairs to throw herself from a high window, the camera takes her point of view and flies out to crash through a glass roof below (Stanley Kubrick often cited *Le Plaisir* as one of his favourite films, and Alex's famous jump in *A Clockwork Orange* is surely a direct steal).

"*Le plaisir n'est pas gai*," is the famous closing line of this last story, translated here as "Happiness

is no lark." Ophüls's film, in its generosity and inspiration, is a wondrous celebration of the complexities of that statement.

Disc: A beautiful restoration, and those responsible for this Gaumont transfer have happily not succumbed to smoothing out the delicate textures of the original. The film is subtitled though sadly not the extras, which are haphazardly edited but offer many insights into the film and the difficulties of its production.

LA REINE MARGOT

Patrice Chéreau; France 1994; Pathé/Region B Blu-ray; 159 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: documentary, 'Il était une fois... La Reine Margot', interview with Daniele Thompson and Patrice Chéreau, deleted scenes, storyboards, costume tests, photographs

Reviewed by David Thompson

Patrice Chéreau's death in 2013 was regarded as a major loss in France, for few had a higher reputation in the world of theatre and opera (his revolutionary production of Wagner's *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1976 is still spoken of with awe). In cinema, Chéreau's reputation is not so fixed, even if it was the *métier* he most wished to practise. His films tended to fluctuate between gloomy genre exercises and intense, personal stories, mainly focusing on gay life. But worldwide his greatest achievement was *La Reine Margot*, a hugely expensive 'costume drama' with a stellar cast, which won two prizes at Cannes and five Césars. It was widely distributed but, thanks to the weight of one Harvey Weinstein, was mostly seen in a shortened version of 145 minutes, with a deleted scene of Margot and her lover under a red cloak inserted to up the 'romance' factor and provide a neat poster image. This recently restored version broadly goes back to the director's original cut, but with that scene reinserted.



Le Plaisir The film boasts an extraordinary richness in its casting and above all in its peerless *mise en scène*, as fine as anything in Ophüls's output

Behind the film is a classic novel by Alexandre Dumas, though any resemblance to the many glossy versions of his musketeer stories is left far behind. At its heart is the terrible conflict between the Catholic and Huguenot factions in 16th-century France: the country is effectively ruled by a widowed Catholic matriarch, Catherine de' Medici (Virna Lisi), who contrives a marriage between her promiscuous daughter Marguerite (the 'Queen Margot' of the title, played by Isabelle Adjani) and the protestant Henri de Navarre (Daniel Auteuil). But this political show does not prevent the famous St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, when leading Huguenot guests in Paris for the wedding are slaughtered in their hundreds. Parallel to this conflict, the film follows the growing passion between Margot and a volatile young Huguenot, La Môle (Vincent Perez), whom she first chances on cruising the streets on her 'wedding night'.

Chéreau's achievement was to make of a historical romance a dark vision of religious intolerance that felt (and still feels) all too contemporary. The film emerged at a time of violence in Iran, the Rwandan genocide and the atrocities in the former Yugoslavia. The latter connection is strongly underlined by the use of music by Emir Kusturica's Serbian house composer Goran Bregovic, which alternates between occasional pastiche (grandiose, Monteverdian choral music at the wedding) and soulful songs. The scenes of the hacked bodies in the streets and their subsequent disposal in deep pits clearly reference images filmed at the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps. A key inspiration for Chéreau was the work of Géricault, with his focus on the human body (mainly male and muscular) and deep shadows. One key decision was to remove all hats from the characters, a small detail that instantly brings them closer to our time. That – plus Chéreau's preference for greasy, matted hair, sweat-drenched flesh and copious outpourings of blood – makes the film at times almost unbearably intense.

This longer version feels richer and more involving than the shorter one, and as its makers ruefully comment in their interviews, it is unlikely that a film on this scale could be made in France today.

Disc: A beautiful transfer, delivering all the richness of Philippe Rousselot's magnificent photography. Sadly, no subtitles on the extras, which are of a higher standard than the usual.

UNIVERSAL MONSTER MOVIES

THE MONSTER AND THE GIRL

Stuart Heisler; USA 1941; Universal Vault Series/Region 1 DVD; 65 minutes; 1.33:1

JUNGLE WOMAN

Reginald Le Borg; USA 1944; Universal Vault Series/Region 1 DVD; 61 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Kim Newman

These two ape-themed mad science movies from Universal's no-frills 'vault' series make up a decent thematic double bill – and show just how strange straight-faced genre programmers from the Golden Age of Hollywood could be.

Reginald Le Borg's *Jungle Woman* (1944), very much the lesser of the two, is among the low spots of the flagging Universal monster cycle.



Beautiful and the dam: Lee Remick in *Wild River*

A sequel to Edward Dmytryk's livelier *Captive Wild Woman*, it manages to be incomprehensible to anyone who hasn't seen the earlier film while at the same time using yards of stock footage from it (some of which contains wild animal stock footage from the earlier *The Big Cage*) to introduce its title character. However, it also doesn't make sense as a follow-up to the original, since it spends almost all its hour-and-a-minute running time on an inquest which hashes over a mystery that was solved in the first film. With the impressive make-up monster seen only in flashbacks, and money saved by having witnesses talk about exciting scenes we don't get to see, the film takes just about the only tack it can by adopting the stratagem of Val Lewton's *Cat People* and using shadows and ambiguity to delay the reveal that amnesiac Paula (Acquanetta) is a female gorilla transformed into a femme fatale by a mad scientist (John Carradine, in the first film) and hardly helped by the kindly attention of a new researcher (soft-spoken J. Carrol Naish) in this one.

Heavy-eyed Acquanetta, briefly an exotic star in the Maria Montez mould, stalks through studio woods in shoulder-pads with her stiff arms forward in an approximate gorilla gait and with a blankness that almost translates lack of acting ability into an inhuman characterisation – but her wooden dialogue delivery scuppers any chances she might have of joining even the lower tiers of the monster pantheon occupied by the Creeper or the She-Wolf of London. Despite clunker lines ("Joan, I'm responsible for the fiendish murders of an inhuman monstrous creature") and a deadly pace, the film still has a certain appeal to genre completists for its conversational matter-of-fact approach to an utterly demented premise.

Stuart Heisler's *The Monster and the Girl* (1941), originally produced for Paramount, is better made but even more peculiar in its premise, mingling a sensationalist crime drama on a subject expressly forbidden by the Production Code with a fantastical human-into-gorilla brain transplant scenario that allows for a slasher-movie-style revenge rampage as the 'Mangler Murderer' takes out a succession of exceptionally slimy gangster villains.

Like *Jungle Woman*, *The Monster and the Girl* succumbs to the 1940s craze for flashbacks by opening with the murder trial of Scot Webster (Phillip Terry), who is railroaded by a crooked DA in league with a vice ring. Susan Webster (Ellen Drew), the accused's sister, takes the stand and testifies that as an innocent girl new to the

big city she was lured into a sham marriage to a heel (Robert Paige) and forced into prostitution (vaguely defined as being a hostess in a not-very-nice club). When Scot tries to find the vanished husband, he is framed by the boss (Paul Lukas) for a random murder and winds up on death row, donating his brain to a scientist (George Zucco, a reliable expert in such cases) who implants it into a gorilla. With his newfound strength, the gorilla-man escapes and starts mangling his way through the vice gang – incidentally bonding poignantly with a stray dog, though Heisler is more excited by shadowily lit rooftop-prowling and irresistibly ridiculous sequences of the gorilla battering to death the terrified likes of Marc Lawrence ("I don't wanna get mangled!"), Onslow Stevens and Joseph Calleja (as an unctuous fake reverend).

Disc: Both films are presented without extras.

WILD RIVER

Elia Kazan; USA 1960; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B/2 Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 110 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: trailer, audio commentary with Glenn Kenny and Farran Smith Nehme, booklet with essay by Adrian Martin

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Prompted by time spent in backwoods Tennessee on 1937 union booster *The People of the Cumberland*, Elia Kazan had long mulled over this untypically lyrical New Deal rural melodrama. With time, Kazan found his sympathies shifting from Montgomery Clift's earnest Tennessee Valley Authority fixer to the matriarch Ella Garth (a steely, aged-up Jo Van Fleet) refusing to leave land that will be flooded by a big dam project. Consequently, it's an agreeably undidactic and socially ambivalent piece, gaining an elegiac feel from cinematographer Ellsworth Frederick's autumnal, mist-wreathed landscapes (the molasses-slow drift of the river ferry, a house torched like a Viking funeral). But it's beady nonetheless about the racist economic realities of the Depression-era South, where the name of Eleanor Roosevelt is employed as a deadly insult.

Kazan is still famous primarily as an actor's director, and his visual style and use of CinemaScope and location here are masterly, as they had proved in *East of Eden* (1955). The Garth women stare down jury-like from their long porch, while Clift's besuited interloper is consistently dwarfed by tall trees and wide water. There's an interesting deviation too from his trademark tortured soul in Clift's hesitant but determined mien, as he's batted about by everything from revenge-seeking rednecks to Lee Remick's strong-minded love interest. Still, the film's worthy subject matter meant that Fox lost confidence and gave it a parlous release, causing Richard Schickel to dub it later one of the most "deeply buried failures by a distinguished director in movie history".

Disc: A handsome russet-toned Blu-ray transfer, with a small but well-chosen extras package. An authoritative essay from Adrian Martin is welcome, but Glenn Kenny and Farran Smith Nehme's connoisseur commentary is a real boon, packed with thickets of research running from Kazan's writings to the career of singer Big Jeff Bess, uncredited and unnerving as the mother-loving Joe John Garth. **S**

Lost and found

EL VAMPIRO NEGRO

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

This rethinking of Lang's *M* mixes melancholy with claustrophobic tension, and is a noteworthy example of South American *noir*

By Imogen Sara Smith

Fritz Lang said that he made *M* (1931) to warn mothers about neglecting their children. This finger-pointing message abruptly tacked on to the end has always struck me as one of the few flaws in a nearly perfect film. *El vampiro negro* (*The Black Vampire*, 1953), an Argentine film produced, directed and co-written by Román Viñoly Barreto, is less a remake than a rethinking of *M*. While Lang's film divides its attention between a pathetic, compulsive child-killer and the raffish underworld denizens who capture and judge him, *El vampiro negro* centres on a mother whose child is threatened. She is neither a scapegoat nor a saintly heroine, but a strong, flawed woman caught in a world where terror coexists with pervasive melancholy.

Virtually unknown outside Argentina, *El vampiro negro* had never been shown in the US prior to its premiere at San Francisco's Castro Theatre during the Noir City festival in January this year. The Film Noir Foundation, which produces the festival, worked with film historian and collector Fernando Martín Peña to create a new 35mm print and English subtitles. According to Peña, the film was popular and critically acclaimed on its release, and played in other Spanish-language markets, but is now not widely known even in Argentina, since it is never shown on television. The Film Noir Foundation plans additional US screenings this year.

Classic *noir* films from Mexico and South America have received little serious attention north of the border, where they are hard to see, but entries such as *El vampiro negro* prove that they represent a significant branch on the family tree of global post-war *noir*. This film was one of the most important works by Viñoly Barreto, a prolific director in many genres (and father of architect Rafael Viñoly). Here he combines an expressionist style, in which images struggle not to be swallowed by dark shadows, or waver like reflections on black pools, with a neorealist evocation of the sunstruck, everyday streets of Buenos Aires. (The moody cinematography is by Aníbal González Paz, the script co-written by Alberto Etchebehere, who was himself primarily a cinematographer.) People move through a grimy, constricted world of sewers, alleys, smoky nightclubs, cage elevators and claustrophobic apartments. The sense that everyone is trapped gives the film a stifling, explosively tense mood.

The sultry blonde Olga Zubarry stars as Rita, a nightclub entertainer who happens to catch a horrific glimpse from her dressing-room window of a man dumping a child's body into



Murder in mind: *El vampiro negro*

the sewers. A working mother just trying to support her daughter and stay out of trouble, Rita is brave, embittered, sometimes blinkered. She initially resists helping the police, sparring with the inspector assigned to the case (Robert Escalada). An upright and dedicated man with a crippled wife, he lusts after the vital, sexy Rita – who is harshly punished when the killer she has protected ends up abducting her own child.

Rita's story is intertwined with that of the killer, Professor Teodoro Ulber (Nathán Pinzón). With his doughy, sad-clown face, Pinzón is both creepy and pitiful; a pudgy little man – like Peter Lorre's iconic original – tormented by the way women laugh at him. He leads a double life, as a shy professor who teaches English to young women and as a goblin who stalks the city streets looking for unaccompanied little girls. In one of the few touches imported directly from Lang's film, he's recognised by a blind toy-seller because he habitually whistles 'In the Hall of the Mountain King'. While in Joseph Losey's gritty, excellent American remake (from 1951, also titled *M*), David Wayne's killer tries to salve his murderous impulses by strangling a doll, Ulber gets some relief from crushing a glass in his hand, caressing his bloodied fingers. In equally sad, disturbing scenes, he weeps over a baby doll taken from one of the children he's killed; and on a rollercoaster

Here, the innocence of childhood is menaced not just by one sick man, but by pervasive sordidness and corruption



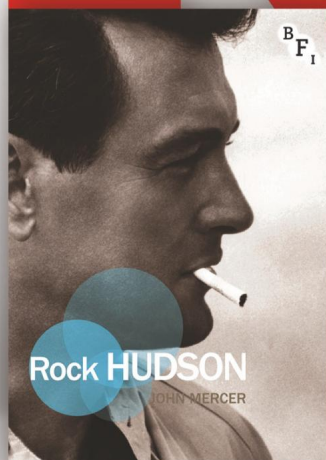
Scream queen: the poster for *El vampiro negro*

with another of his intended victims he looks more terrified than the little girl he clutches.

In every version of this story, the primal horror of a child killer on the loose strips away society's illusions. Here the innocence of childhood is menaced not just by one sick man, but by pervasive sordidness and corruption. When Rita sings in the cabaret, the faces in the audience are grotesque, ugly and leering. When she shrieks in her dressing room, a woman on the dance floor tells her partner matter-of-factly, "I also like to be beaten, but I don't scream." After Ulber kills a girl in an apartment block, a woman selfishly lies about a man found in the building – protecting her reputation even though this makes him a suspect. Throughout the movie, dark phantasmagoric images seem to bubble up from under the surface of the ordinary, the way the Rorschach blots we see in the surreal opening sequence dissolve into the killer's confused visions of laughing women.

Despite its overt message, Lang's *M* never takes any intimate interest in the child victims or their bereaved mothers. *El vampiro negro* has a more empathetic vision, and it is also in some ways a scarier film, because its horror is not impersonal but directed at people we've come to care about. Like *M*, this film ends with a trial where the jury, like the movie audience, must decide whether or not the tormented killer is responsible for his actions. But here the real climax comes earlier, when Rita has to confront the killer as he holds a knife to her daughter's throat, cornered by armed police, and persuade him to let the girl go. At the crucial moment, everything depends not on men's guns but on a woman's words. **S**

Read

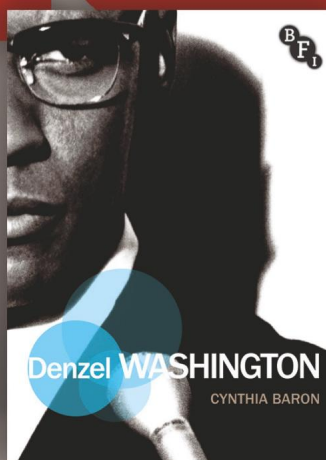


ROCK HUDSON

By John Mercer, BFI Publishing/
Palgrave, 168pp, paperback, illustrated,
£15.99, ISBN 9781844574643
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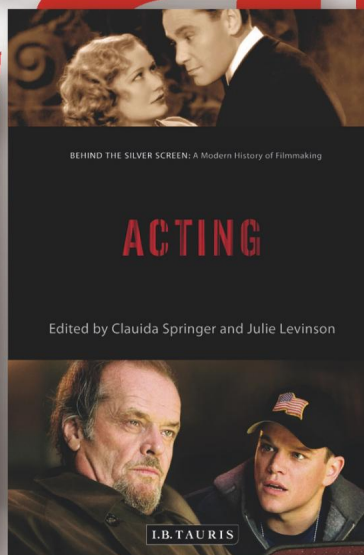
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By Cynthia Baron, BFI Publishing/
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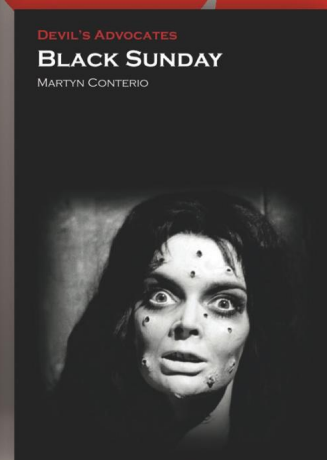
ACTING

**Behind the Silver Screen, Vol 1: A
Modern History of Filmmaking**

Edited by Claudia Springer and Julie
Levinson; I.B. Tauris; 224pp; hardback
£56.00, ISBN 9781784534028; paperback
£14.99, ISBN 9781784534035

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BLACK SUNDAY

By Martyn Conterio, Devil's Advocates
series, Auteur Publishing, 104pp, paperback,
illustrated, £9.99, ISBN 9781906733834
Despite a reputation as one of the
greatest and most influential of all
horror films, there is surprisingly
little written about Mario Bava's *Black
Sunday* (1960). In this Devil's Advocate,
Martyn Conterio places the film in its
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Italian horror films with sound, and
considers how its success kick-started
both the Italian horror boom and
Bava's directorial career. He discusses
the film's fresh and pioneering
approach to horror tropes such as the
vampire and the witch, the casting
of Barbara Steele and the sometimes
confusing history of a film known
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Books



Waiting for Godard: Jack Palance and Brigitte Bardot in Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963)

SHIFTING THE SCENE

MISE EN SCÈNE AND FILM STYLE

From Classical Hollywood to New Media Art

By Adrian Martin, Palgrave Macmillan, 272pp, £60, ISBN 9781137269942

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Gathering together a seemingly inconsonant collection of texts in its broad-armed embrace, the Australian-born scholar Adrian Martin's new volume *Mise en Scène and Film Style* is a virtuosic act of synthesis, and a destroyer of false dichotomies. Martin's subject is *mise en scène*, an often vaguely defined term that took hold in the 1950s as a means of artistically validating the particular spatial language of cinema, and which we haven't been able to shake since. Per the book's subtitle, Martin's principal objects of study are the various strains of narrative cinema, and those other forms of 'audiovisual' media – including television, gallery installations and new-media art – from which cinema is often segregated, in critical theory if not in practice. Endeavouring to close this breach by finding a more inclusive

definition of *mise en scène*, Martin strikes down other specious rivalries: montage and *mise en scène*, sound and image, criticism and formalism. He even, in an unexpected detour, mounts a defence of reality TV, tossing off a comparison between Pasolini's *Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975) and ITV's *Ladette to Lady* (2005-2010).

In other hands this sort of connection might seem a provocation, but by the time Martin has arrived at this point he's established his bona

fides beyond any reasonable doubt. Setting out on "a reconsideration of the legacy of *mise en scène*", Martin first has to identify what exactly the phrase means – or has meant in various times and places. His historical collation of "*mise en scène* multiplicity" takes us from "the heroic age of... the 1950s through its radical critique in the 1960s and on to its various reformations in subsequent decades" – in some cases as viewed through the prism of a single figure as, in the section quoted, tracked through the writings and filmmaking practice of Jacques Rivette. Perhaps unavoidably, a number of French sources are quoted herein – the poststructuralist critic and theorist Raymond Bellour is cited more than any other single writer – but though classical *mise en scène* is traceable to a particular moment in Parisian cinephilia, Martin's survey of the term's various definitions is international in breadth. He draws from English, Spanish, German and Japanese-language writing, while also giving the Bengali director Ritwik Ghatak a privileged place in his narrative, using his perspicacious understanding of sound design in a chapter on the overlooked aural element of *mise en scène* ('Sonic spaces'), as well as closing the book with an analysis of a scene from Ghatak's *The Golden Line* (aka *The Golden Thread*, 1965).



Brian de Palma's *Passion* (2012)

The close read of *The Golden Line* is one of several analyses that Martin sets down to illustrate the development of *mise en scène*, not only as discussed, but as practised. The book's prologue leads with an example, parsing the split-screen setpiece in Brian de Palma's *Passion* (2012), an individual choice that would've won me over even if nothing else that followed did. Elsewhere Martin offers exegeses of scenes from Vincente Minnelli's *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever* (1970) and Luchino Visconti's *White Nights* (1957) as instances of the pleasure of classical *mise en scène*, while Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963) and Jerzy Skolimowski's *Walkover* (1965) are given as instances of the modern/postmodern "crises" which the analytical language of classical *mise en scène* was insufficient to address when they arose.

From here on, Martin addresses various aspects of motion-picture art excluded by the vague original definitions of *mise en scène*, and catalogues critical corrections that have attempted to accommodate them. In a chapter titled 'A detour via reality', Martin expands on the still-young concept of 'social *mise en scène*', which concentrates on the degree to which constructed *mise en scène* is guided, in various

He even tosses off a comparison between Pasolini's 'Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom' and ITV's 'Ladette to Lady'

ways, by a dependency on the "raw material of social codes" – for the author, a necessary correction to the Romantic image of the director-artist creating in and from a vacuum. In the book's penultimate chapter, 'Cinema, Audiovisual Art', Martin demolishes the theoretical barriers between cinema and "the entire panoply of society's machines of audiovision". He supplants the Bazinian indexical materiality, which afforded cinema a privileged place in the cosmos, with a new "aesthetic materiality" brought on by the digital era. Finally, Martin documents the emergence of the *dispositif*, defined as "an audiovisual game with rules, constraints and procedures" where "the execution of the game's moves – the following of the rules – generates outcomes, results, and sometimes surprises". (Examples given including Lisa Kudrow's screenshot-based web series *Web Therapy*, Lars Von Trier's *The Five Obstructions* and an installation by Apichatpong Weerasethakul.)

Throughout, Martin places himself at odds with the "much-touted and entirely overrated 'death of cinema'", defying the nostalgic tendency that relegates *mise en scène* to the status of an (almost) lost art and, by enshrining cinema away from other audiovisual art, reduces it to a museum piece. Martin's stated desire is "not to dissolve cinema into an indifferent mass or flow of images and sounds... but precisely to sharpen our sense of its contribution as an audiovisual art of the 20th and 21st centuries." In other words: by losing its pedestal, cinema has everything to gain. 

AFTER THE SILENTS

Hollywood Film Music in the Early Sound Era, 1926-34

By Michael Slowik, Columbia University Press, 352pp, £20.50, ISBN 9780231165839

Reviewed by Neil Brand

Among the neglected areas of study in film music is the period between the release of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 and *King Kong* in 1933. This paranoid period, during which sound was slowly adopted by a slightly terrified industry, has come down to us as one of musical stagnation, largely thanks to the great Hollywood composer Max Steiner's rather self-serving summation of early 30s scoring practices as having "very little underscoring in those days... music for dramatic pictures was only used when it was required by the script..." The assumption has grown that cinema from 1928 onwards was a torrent of words, only stemmed musically as the Golden Age began, with Steiner's *King Kong*, Korngold's *Captain Blood* (1935) and Waxman's *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).

After the Silents gives the lie to that canard, tracing the myriad developments in scoring practices across the major studios as sound cinema took hold. Beginning with a very useful summing-up of pre-sound narrative scoring practices from theatrical melodrama, opera, stage musicals and silent cinema, Slowik intricately analyses the uses of music in the first synchronised scores, the full talkies and film musicals of the early 1930s. He goes on to show that within a contemporary canon that included *Trouble in Paradise*, *The Bitter Tea of General Yen*, *The Most Dangerous Game* and *Blonde Venus* (all 1932), *King Kong* was not so much a seismic shift as a more ambitious use of existing musical devices.

To my mind, the final ambition of film scoring is to set up invisible connections in the mind of the listener, linking characters to places or situations, creating subdivisions of emotion that are specific to a film's context, rather than broad brushstroke emotional statements. The road to such sophistication was rocky, the speed of development tied to technological advances. The first of these was rerecording – the ability

to fit music in post-production rather than relying on players during filming. Another was the knotty progression from diegetic music (music whose source you can actually see on screen) to non-diegetic (music that is added to narrative as a dramatic convention) – the jarring moment in *The Jazz Singer* in which Cantor Rabinowitz silenced Jolson's singing with an intertitle, "Stop!", was noticed by everybody in the audience, the underscoring pantomimic conversation that followed being a huge anticlimax to Jolson's audible *joie de vivre*. But how to make that transition logical, unnoticed?

The answer was to educate audiences into a convention of non-diegetic underscoring dialogue with narratively appropriate cueing, and in his examination of this point Slowik offers some lovely analysis of early Warner releases such as *Lights of New York* (1928) and *The Squall* (1929). From there, scores could begin to address the audience's need for non-verbal communication. Studios started to increase music and reduce dialogue sequences as the sheer novelty of sound wore off. As the MGM executive Arthur Loew put it in July 1931, "Get back to the pantomime that made the Motion Picture Industry. Let's supplement the pantomime with the gifts of speech with which the electrical gods have endowed us. But let's not talk ourselves to death!" Audiences were tired of long unedited dialogue sequences, but if those had to go, what would take their place? A headline in *Variety* in March 1931 yelled, "Action Films Help Music Revival", arguing that, "With music, the lack of talk is not noticed!"

This still left questions unanswered: how far should pre-existing music be used? What about song-plugging? (*Red-Headed Woman* from 1932 is superbly brazen in establishing a saleable title-song, then featuring the sheet music for it sitting on various piano music stands throughout the picture...) Above all, how to take audiences to a world they have never experienced, or inside a character's head?

After the Silents provides a detailed road map of these developments and succeeds in its intention to fill the gap in film history, delineating the different approaches to scoring from studio to studio and film to film, and ultimately showing that *King Kong* was part, albeit an exceptional one, of a greater development in musical narrative sophistication.

Where the book falls down is in its plodding emphasis on scholarly revisionism, sometimes leading to detailed expressions of what Basil Fawlty would call "the bleedin' obvious" – obvious even to the least musically minded reader. Also, in throwing the net wide over a multiplicity of scoring practices, Slowik has made much less of the gifted individuals who headed studio music departments at this time, many of whom, by dint of the trust they had earned from their employers, had the confidence to experiment boldly with music and drive the art forward.

Nonetheless, this is a very useful book, well illustrated with simple musical examples and very thoroughly researched, both in terms of viewings and in drawing upon previous writings on the subject. 



Grant and Dietrich in *Blonde Venus* (1932)

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Modernism* (Rutgers University Press, 2012).

Film Studies



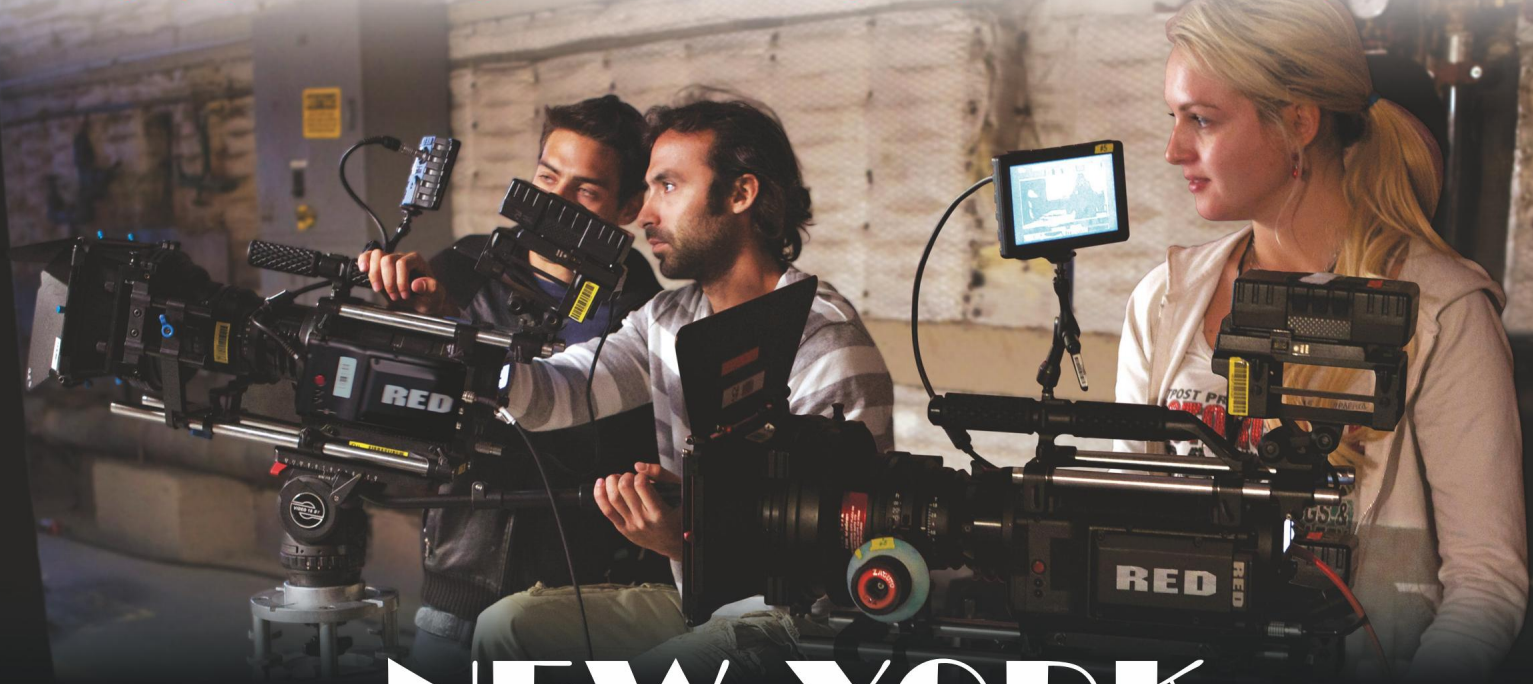
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new wave films



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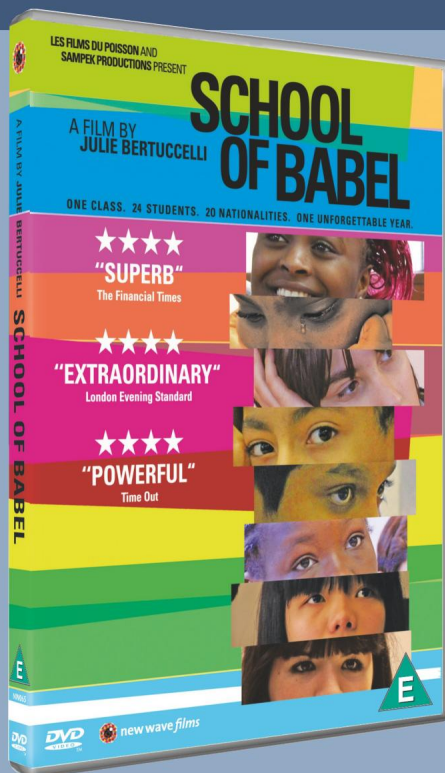
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Julie Bertuccelli

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PIRATE ERROR

In his review of Paul Cronin's *Werner Herzog: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Books, S&S, February), Mark Cousins advises readers to watch a Herzog film, *Fata Morgana*, on YouTube. While I am not oblivious to the existence of digital platforms and torrent sites which offer illegal ways to engage with copyrighted material, I do care about film and the right of filmmakers to earn their living through practising their art. The promotion of a 'free is fine' attitude flies directly in the face of the global film industry's well-founded concerns about piracy. A fully sanctioned, officially licensed version of *Fata Morgana* can be found on the recent BFI DVD and Blu-ray box-set *The Werner Herzog Collection*, and as an extra feature on the new DVD edition of *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (where there is also a full-length Herzog audio commentary for *Fata Morgana*).

Sam Dunn Head of BFI Video Publishing

SHORT CUTS

Tony Rayns made the assumption in his review of 'Six Gothic Tales by Edgar Allan Poe' (Home Cinema, S&S, March) that *The Fall of the House of Usher* was abbreviated to *House of Usher* for the US market in an effort to emphasise the monstrosity of the titular house. Reportedly, the title was shortened for a simpler, if equally commercial, reason – to make it easier to fit on cinema marquees.

Paul Cowgill Bristol

DISREGARDING HENRY

Since Henry K. Miller hadn't seen the first two films, or even *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, before reviewing the final part of the Hobbit trilogy (S&S, February), I stopped reading his review after the first paragraph. One-all, Miller!

Peter Quinn Tooting, London

TANKS FOR SHARING

I had to write to express my gratitude – and admiration – for Nick Pinkerton's review of David Ayer's *Fury* (S&S, December 2014). In his intelligent, informative and perceptive piece he helps to redress the balance for this otherwise maligned or widely ignored film.

He correctly detects the considerable influence of Sam Peckinpah on Ayer. But, most acutely, Pinkerton identifies the dramatic high-point of the picture, which – unexpectedly in a movie full of spectacular and violent set-piece battles – takes place in a conversation around a dinner table.

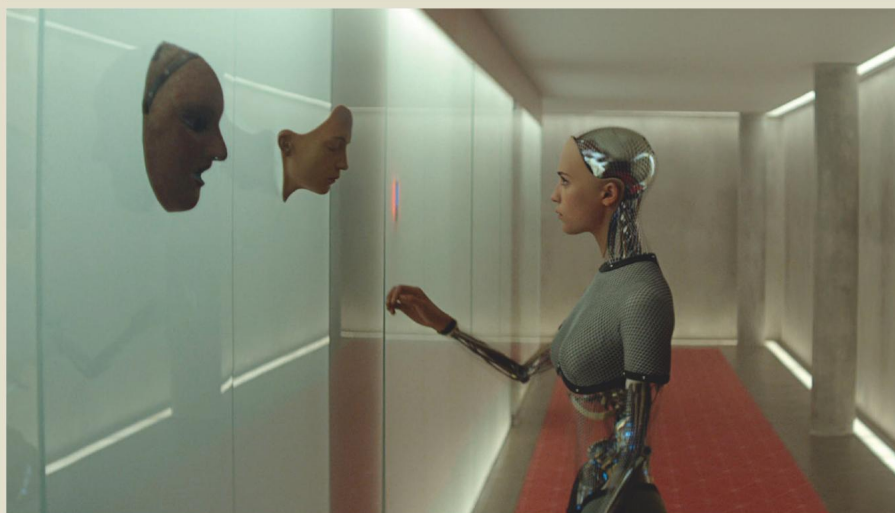
It's worth adding that the striking end-title sequence – very much worth staying to see – is vividly reminiscent of Peckinpah's *Cross of Iron*.

Andrew Cartmel by email

CLAWS OUT

David Thomson's article on Mike Nichols (S&S, February) dismisses the director's *Wolf* (1994) as lying "somewhere between foolish and bad". The public knows better, and the film is still in the DVD shops after 20 years. A literate

LETTER OF THE MONTH GRIM FAIRYTALE



Spoiler alert: this letter reveals a key plot twist about *Ex Machina*

The shade of the French fairytale author Charles Perrault (1628-1703) might be forgiven for thinking he is due some credit, if not some royalties; not only have two of his stories, 'Cinderella' and 'Little Red Riding Hood', been appropriated recently for *Into the Woods* (reviewed S&S, February), but *Ex Machina* is a reworking of his story 'Bluebeard' with robot wives. *Ex Machina* (reviewed S&S, February) starts playing with Bluebeard tropes early when uber-geek Nathan, with his glossy black beard, welcomes his guest to his isolated home (not a chateau but a fortified bunker) and reassures him that his electronic 'key' will open some doors but not the forbidden ones. So when you see that Nathan's bedroom is lined with very large fitted wardrobes, you know there will be no sock-drawers behind any of the doors – this Bluebeard sleeps in his dungeon. The grisly revelation of the previous wives suspended naked in those wardrobes looks surprisingly similar to the

scene in George Méliès's *Bluebeard* (1901) which has them hanging in a row on a gibbet.

Since Méliès, there must have been thousands of grimly similar movies with women imprisoned and subjected to sex and violence, but among these there are certainly enough 'Bluebeard' movies to form a genre.

Ex Machina is a voyeuristic movie (if there are any other kinds). Its initial justification for its objectifying gaze upon a woman trapped in a glass booth and on trial for her life – cf Nastassja Kinski in *Paris, Texas* (1984) – is that she is after all just an object, a robot. But there is a good deal of lingering on female dressing and undressing. This culminates in a twist, worthy of Angela Carter's Bluebeard stories, when the sole surviving robot wife cannibalises her predecessors, finishing with a queasy 'pastetaste' where she assumes their skin to escape, like Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). The donning of this skin literally mirrors the striptease of a previous wife who unbuttoned both skin and clothes.

Dan Smith by email

screenplay, Giuseppe Rotunno photography, a Morricone score, thrilling make-up, unmannered performances from Nicholson and Pfeiffer, plus a distinguished cast, any number of striking scenes... Come on, pundits – just unwind and try to enjoy top films when they come along.

David Spiller Leicester

MAIS OU EST LE BOEUF?

Reviewing Jean-Luc Godard's *Goodbye to Language* (S&S, March), Nick Pinkerton writes that "a number of esteem-worthy critics have had no compunction in calling it the best film of the past year." I puzzled about this and wondered how some, though not Pinkerton, can have felt this way. How can a film based on a trivial narrative be considered the best film of the past year? It is visually exciting, inspiring in its use of innovative film techniques. It is a masterclass of visual and

sound activity. It is filled with film quotations, literary quotations, philosophical quotations. It even quotes itself. The 3D creates a double-image that becomes a single one, the narrative becomes a double narrative that separates and comes together again, Bresson-like camera angles peep in and out. Yet even though the narrative is doubled up and decorated with quotes and film techniques, it remains essentially trivial. I wish the film offered me something more at its heart.

Tony Partridge Sligo, Ireland.

Additions and corrections

March p.64 *Dreamcatcher*, Certificate 15, 103m 33s; p.69 *Appropriate Behavior*, Certificate 15, 85m 58s; p.71 *Coherence*, Theatrical classification: Certificate 15, 87m 49s; p.77 *It Follows* (Additional) Film Extracts: *Women of the Prehistoric Planet* (1965); p.78 *Kill the Messenger*, Certificate 15, 112m 20s; p.81 *Life of Riley*, Certificate 12A, 108m 20s; p.82 *Love Is All*, Certificate 12A, 73m 49s; p.83 *Maidan*, Certificate 12A, 133m 44s; p.87 *Shaun the Sheep The Movie*, Certificate, 84m 58s, Onscreen title: *Shaun the Sheep Movie*

MEDIUM COOL



The mix of fiction and reality in Haskell Wexler's angry political film raises tough questions for the media and its place in society

By Paul Cronin

By the closing years of the 1960s, new film technologies had allowed the camera to be hand-held, a liberation quickly embraced, for different purposes, by groups across the political spectrum. Haskell Wexler's unique film from 1969 is an intriguing hybrid of fiction and reality, featuring professional actors carefully integrated into moments of authentic protest and activism. But the film also turns our attention to the responsibilities of those behind the camera.

The primary turning point in Wexler's story arrives when John (Robert Forster), a Chicago television news cameraman, discovers that his bosses have been giving the police and FBI footage he has filmed of street protests. The powers-that-be are, he presumes, using his images to identify troublemakers. By 1968, those protesting had also cottoned on, all too aware that the fastest way to announce a cause was to stand in front of a camera. Images and messages transmitted by the mass media could, within seconds, open the eyes of millions (see the recent *Selma*, which makes clear how important the broadcasting of the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery was in galvanising support for the Civil Rights Movement).

Wexler's work as a cameraman on *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) and *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) might have furnished him with an enviable reputation as a Hollywood

aesthete, but when it came to his directorial debut *Medium Cool* – over which he exercised full control – his time spent as an activist and political documentarian fuelled a need also to express ideological tendencies. The best way to dramatise his feelings about American society? Wexler fashioned his lead character after himself: an image-maker struggling to know which path to take in an era when – as Marshall McLuhan suggested – “the medium is the message”. McLuhan's reading of modernity and his articulations about the spread of information – thanks, in part, to television and the modern news media – helped transform *Medium Cool* into an experiment in self-reflexivity. Wexler's camera is constantly being pulled into the action, with numerous instances in the film of the fourth wall being broken, including that grand line of dialogue, “Look out Haskell, it's real!” heard at a particularly thrilling moment, as teargas drifts toward the lens. The cameraman's involvement in the fact and fiction of *Medium Cool* is a phenomenon that plays out most provocatively in the film's closing seconds.

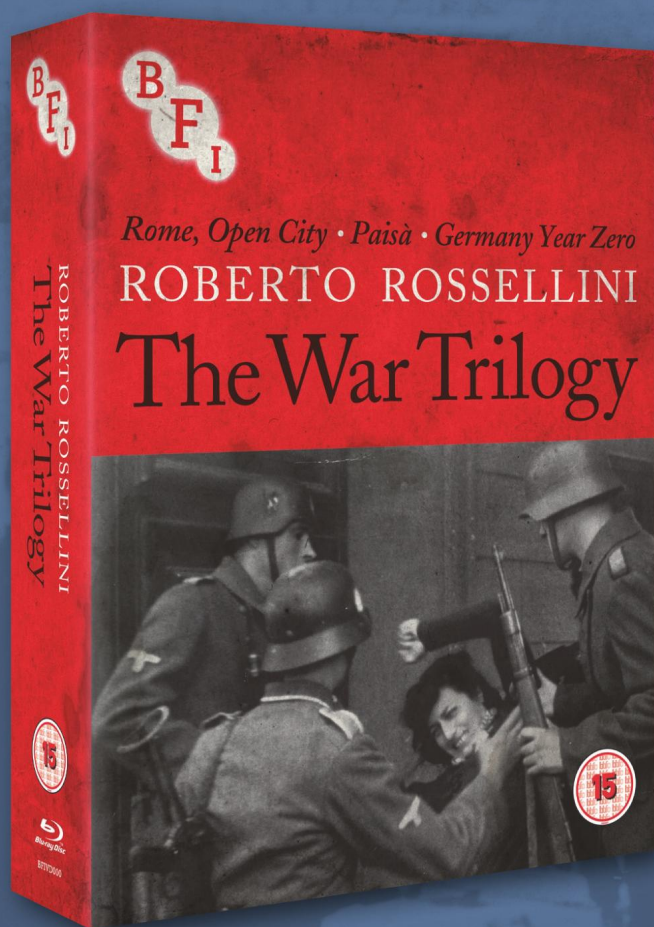
A tree-lined road. John and his friend Eileen (Verna Bloom) are driving along, listening to the radio as it broadcasts details of a violent mêlée at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, 1968. The car careers out of control and crashes. Another car drives past, the accident fascinating to its voyeuristic occupants, who stare and then drive off, but not before a boy in

Wexler's camera is constantly being pulled into the action, with numerous instances in the film of the fourth wall being broken

the back seat takes a photograph of the death and destruction. We see the crash from a distance, smoke pluming from the bonnet, before the camera pans slowly right and a platform appears, constructed upon a high scaffold, which holds a camera mounted on a tripod. One camera films another as the protesters' chant of “The Whole World is Watching” intones on the soundtrack. Behind the tripod is a middle-aged moustachioed gentleman, one eye obscured, looking through the lens of a 35mm camera. This is Wexler, finally revealing himself, having taunted us with so many close calls throughout the previous 109 minutes.

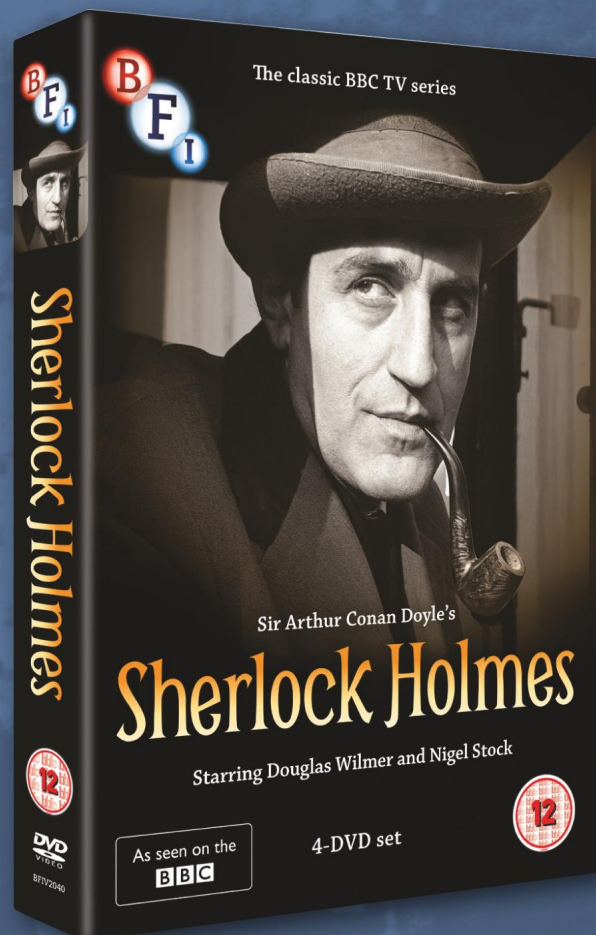
The ending of *Medium Cool* (a kind of homage to Godard's *Le Mépris*) mirrors the opening minute, in which John films the victim of a car crash before calling the emergency services. Two car crashes, two acts of callousness, and the film is brought full circle with the point well made: filmmakers – documentarians and otherwise – would do well to consider the wider implications of their work. “I try to use the cameraman as symbolic of a kind of professional,” explained Wexler in a 1970 BBC interview. “It could be a scientist working on some minute problem, the end result of which would be for bacterial warfare, but whose mind is totally on the microscope and the technical problem afoot. Specialisation is a refuge, a way to avoid one's social responsibility, and a way to avoid the consequence of one's work. I imagine there are probably some very active German plumbers that ran gas into the chambers that killed the Jews. They had all the same rationalisations as our scientists have. All those complications are involved in being a professional and just doing your job.” A succinct distillation of this endlessly fascinating piece of quasi-Hollywood cinema. **S**

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